

BLENCARROW

ISABEL MACKAY



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BERTRAND SMITH
ACRES OF BOOKS
Long Bay, N.S.W.

Edna C. Davis

Merry Christmas

from

Edna

BLENCARROW

BLENCARROW

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL MACKAY



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CHAPTER ONE

EUAN CAMERON, aged twelve, sat upon the fence and bent a darkling eye upon his father at the woodpile. The woodpile was in the Camerons' back yard, and the Camerons' back yard was in Blencarrow, and Blencarrow was a small, but exceedingly important, town somewhere around. So now you know exactly where Euan sat.

It was fully fifteen minutes by the sun since the motionless figure of Andrew Cameron had selected a stick and fixed it skilfully on end ready for the swift, smiting blows which meant kindling for to-morrow. For fifteen precious moments no blows had fallen. Nor was there sign of any. The stick waited, unsmitten, while the smiter, rapt and regardless, leaned upon his axe.

Euan swung his feet vigorously through the gap in the paling, bringing his iron toecaps together with a smart clap at every swing. At intervals he rattled a loose picket. More than this he dared not do.

In his pocket lay a stone, smooth and oval, which he fingered tentatively. Supposing he were to throw that stone, or rather to flick it gently, in the general direction of the woodpile? A small little stone like that couldn't hurt anybody, but, if properly aimed, it might startle some one into a renewed interest in worldly things. The question was, would the fact of having David and Goliath for to-morrow's Sunday-School lesson be considered sufficient reason for flicking stones? It might. With his father, it almost certainly would. But there was his mother to consider. Euan's mother, unfortunately, had a way of dis-

counting the very best reasons. The better they were, the more she discounted them. One's talents had practically no scope.

Euan drew the stone from his pocket. It was a good stone. Not too heavy; no edges. His father would probably never know what had aroused him. And, unless his mother should happen to be looking out of the window —

‘Euan!’

The voice from the kitchen doorway was temperate, even friendly, but Euan slid down from the fence rail with a guilty start.

‘Come your ways in,’ went on the voice in the guarded tone which one uses to protect a sleeper. ‘Wipe your feet! How often have I told you not to be disturbing your father at his inventing?’

‘I was not disturbing my father,’ said Euan virtuously. ‘I said no word to my father. I was sitting on the fence.’

‘I saw you,’ said Mrs. Cameron significantly. ‘Take your feet off the rung of that chair! Can you no see that it’s just been scrubbit?’

Euan arose with alacrity. It is all right to sit for hours on a damp log, but a damp chair is a different matter. His sense of injury deepened. Why had his mother called him in if there were no chairs dry enough to sit upon? Even the table was still damp, for it was Saturday afternoon and Mrs. Cameron had been redding up the kitchen. The pine floor had been scrubbed until its whiteness dazzled, the long table shone, the walnut sideboard fairly winked in sombre brightness. It was the turn of the chairs now and they were marshalled, like soldiers, on either side of a square of oilcloth upon which one of their number stood steaming and dripping from its vigorous bath.

‘Sit you on the corner stool,’ directed Mrs. Cameron, ‘and keep your feet from the clean floor until it’s dried. It’s no use at all to look so innocent, for I know well that

you clapped your toes and diddled the fence picket to disturb your father at his thinking.'

'Is it disturbing my father to sit ready to carry in the kindling?' asked Euan innocently. How fortunate that one's thoughts are one's own. Keen as his mother was, she couldn't possibly know about the stone in his pocket.

'Kindling, indeed?' said Mrs. Cameron, wiping a chair, 'and why kindling before supper?' Her tone was not warm. It seemed as if she just couldn't give a fellow credit for disinterested virtue.

'I was wanting to go to the singing school after supper,' said Euan.

'Ah!' It was a note of complete understanding. Strange how grown-ups always understand in the wrong places. 'It's a daftlike notion,' declared Mrs. Cameron. 'What would you be doing at the singing school? A big clumsy lad like you?'

'Singing,' said the badgered Euan.

Janet Cameron laughed. When she laughed, she became instantly ten years younger, for, in the process of becoming matronly and staid as befitted an elder's wife, Janet had forgotten to look to her laugh which, left to itself, had persisted in remaining young and frivolous. She was a small woman with dark, birdlike eyes and a mouth which she schooled to primness. Euan often wondered how old she was and many times had tried in vain to find out.

'Will you be in the forties, Mother?' he would say insinuatingly.

'I might,' she would answer cautiously, 'And then again I might not.'

'Would it be in the fifties that you are, Mother?'

She would appear to consider this, but would end by saying thoughtfully, 'I wonder.'

'But,' craftily, 'if you were in the sixties your hair would be white like the hair of Mrs. MacAllister.'

Janet would pat her smooth black hair, sparsely flecked with grey, with a prideful hand.

'Well, maybe I'm not just exactly in the sixties,' she would admit. But further than this she would not go. In his own mind, Euan thought that maybe she didn't know herself how old she was, and felt sensitive about it, or perhaps she wasn't always the same age. It seemed like that. When she laughed about the singing school, for instance, she didn't seem old at all.

'You — singing!' repeated Janet. An observant listener might have received an exhaustive comment upon Euan's musical standing in the two words.

Euan grew darkly red, but held his ground.

'I was thinking I would like it,' said he firmly. After all he was well within his rights. There was no good reason why he should not want to go to singing school — except the one reason why he did want to go. And his mother didn't know about that.

Janet began on the last chair. Her moment of amusement over, she was quite elderly again.

'You're too young for the singing school,' she said, adding, 'Aren't you?' as a rare concession.

'There's younger than me,' said Euan.

'You would shuffle your feet.'

'I would remember not to shuffle my feet.'

'Your boots would interrupt the singing.'

'I could wear my Sunday boots.'

'Oh — could you?' said Janet, surprised into a weakness.

Euan took heart. He knew his mother's ways. If you could take her by surprise with some unheard-of proposition, the very boldness of it might carry your point. This introduction of the Sunday boots had been an inspiration, no less. The thing to do now was to waive the point as if it were of small importance.

'If I could only get in the kindling —' he began. His

eyes wandered anxiously through the open door to the unsplit wood. 'If Father — oh, Mother, look! Father's coming out!'

The statue by the woodpile had indeed stirred. As if in a dream, it raised and lifted the axe and, with a jerk of final awakening, steadied the block of wood with a firm foot. The long-delayed blows began to fall with swift precision.

Euan's sigh of relief was distinctly audible. There was still time for the chores before supper, and that without his having prejudiced his case by any overt action. He could now permit himself to show interest in minor things.

'Do you know what it is that my father will be inventing this time?' he asked politely.

Mrs. Cameron shook her head. 'I'm not fashing him with questions,' said she, 'but whiles I've thought it's maybe a plough.'

A plough? Euan looked disappointed. Being of a practical mind he could never understand why his father's inventions were never even remotely related to his business.

'But my father makes wagons, not ploughs,' he offered diffidently.

'He *could* make ploughs,' said Mrs. Cameron loyally.

'Oh,' said Euan.

'It's not what he makes or what he doesn't make,' said Janet, stung by some faint trace of criticism in the 'Oh.' 'It's the mind and brain of him that must always be seeing a new thing. It's creating things he is, like when the Lord made Adam from the dust of the earth.'

'Oh,' said Euan again. But this time there was a tinge of awe which satisfied Janet.

'Your father's a great man, Euan,' said she condescendingly. 'Go you, now, and get in the kindling or there'll be no singing school this night.'

This was equivalent to the withdrawal of active opposi-

tion and Euan set cheerfully about his task. But as he gathered and stacked the kindling and the freshly split wood, he cast curious glances at his father who had so lately been engaged, as it were, in creating a plough from the dust of the earth. It must be wonderful to do such Godlike things. But why a plough? Why not a wagon? Andrew Cameron made wagons. His wagon shop stood just across the street, opposite his house. It had stood there always. It would stand there forever. Euan's first adventure into the mysterious land of print had been by way of the weather-worn sign

THE CAMERON WAGON

‘Never wears out’

It had been difficult, even then, to decipher the ‘Never wears out,’ because, whatever the Cameron wagon might be, the paint which advertised it was not eternal. But even Euan understood that a repainting of the sign would have meant to Andrew Cameron not progress, but defeat. Was the Cameron wagon so little known that its sign should need fresh paint?

In the same way, was the Cameron wagon so faulty that it needed reinventing? Here was the answer to Euan's question if he could have understood it. The Cameron wagon was a good wagon. Andrew had laboured earnestly to make it so. Its continued prosperity proved its worth. But, as far as Andrew was concerned, it was a finished thing. And for a finished thing the questing mind of the inventor had little use. Andrew's thought loved only the uncharted ways. Nor was he ever able to direct its wanderings. In him the urge of creation was too pure to take easily the stamp of commerce. Had there been more alloy there might have been more utility. But when this was pointed out to Andrew, he shook his head.

‘Who am I,’ said he, ‘that I should bargain with the Lord

for the bit ideas which are the unconsidered gifts of his bounty? Forby, man,' with a sudden twinkle, 'it would be of no use whateffer.'

Fortunately for his married peace, he had found in Janet a wife who understood his reasoning and allowed it to curb her expectations without diminishing her pride. To her, the husband she had chosen was a man set apart, a 'man of gifts.' The value she placed upon them was not weighed with gold. Let the stream of useful and comely wagons turned out by the Cameron Wagon Shop supply the comforts and necessities of existence — beyond these, wealth had little to offer a woman of Janet's mind. She had in full measure the sturdy independence of the Scot, who in his heart believes that his worth lies in himself and not in his possessions. Being bothered by no inferiority complex, she did not need the aids of wealth or ostentation to satisfy an inward lack. Not that Janet disdained money. Far from it. But it was to her a means, never an end, and not seldom did she find it interesting to see how many ends she could attain without it.

There was, for instance, the matter of social position. In Blencarrow, a small town in a big, new country, social position was exactly as important as it is anywhere else. But the conditions governing it were different. There were few lines of inheritance or tradition to border or bound. Yet, as men are not anywhere born either free or equal, borders and bounds there were — distinctions and differences settled, without conscious effort or knowledge, by the community itself. Wealth had its place in these distinctions and as time went on would claim it more and more, but to be of the real elect in Blencarrow it was not necessary to be wealthy nor were all the wealthy of the elect. Birth, too, had its full weight, but good birth, in Blencarrow, meant honourable and God-fearing ancestors, rather than mere antiquity in the matter of family trees. Not that Blencarrow was without its

scions of old families, but, save for a certain romantic interest which lingered about their names, they had come to be very much like their neighbours, ranking in general according to their own or their father's position of importance in the community. Society, as such, had been built up, as the town grew, through a process of natural selection. It was composed of all kinds, but, roughly speaking, of only two grades. You were either 'respected' or you were not.

Needless to say, Janet and Andrew Cameron were highly respected. Ian Cameron, father of Andrew, had been a pioneer of whose courage, honesty, and good works the whole world (of Blencarrow) was aware. To the day of his death, Ian Cameron had spoken only the Gaelic in his own house, though he had made shift with English outside. Andrew, his son, could both speak and understand his father's tongue, and, though he rarely used it, his ordinary speech was often flavoured with its idioms. Both men had been church elders and close friends of the minister — in itself a title to distinction. Neither had known a college education, but both had been educated men, if solid reading and original thought have anything to do with education. As for Janet Cameron, *née* Clark, had she not been a daughter of Elspeth Clark, the savour of whose strict and beautiful life was well remembered on the countryside? Certainly she herself was always conscious of that social value and security which rendered pretension absurd.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, all this, Janet did her own housework, including an amount of washing and scrubbing which would terrify the housewife of to-day. Not only could no one else do it to satisfy her, but Janet would have been thoroughly ashamed of any spare time save that which her own quickness and industry provided. True, Mrs. Graham Irving, her next-door neighbour, kept a maid, but Minna Irving, poor thing, had always been delicate besides having been softened by a too-indulgent mother. Janet had

only pity for people who were forced to depend on hired help. Was it not well known that, when the Irvings entertained the Ladies' Aid, one of the ladies always tactfully volunteered to 'run in and help' — thus saving the society and its hostess mutual embarrassment?

It is clear, then, that Janet's only opportunity for showing the Christian virtue of humility was in relation to her husband, and this she did with a thoroughness which left nothing to be desired. In the eyes of Blencarrow, Janet was, in her way, quite as 'respected' as Andrew. But it never occurred to her to think so. A comparison of herself with him would have seemed *lèse majesté*. To think of her husband as equal with herself would have been a deep humiliation; to think of him as less would have been insupportable.

Probably the only person unaware of this attitude of hers was Andrew himself. He was, as nearly as may be, without self-consciousness. Praise of any sort, once he had understood that it was directed toward him, would have disturbed and shamed him. Disapproval would have affected him not at all. He was what he was by inward compulsion — a man with roots.

Meanwhile, this brief survey of the Camerons' state in life has given Euan time to stack his wood and has permitted Janet to wipe her chairs and set them on the flat stones beside the kitchen door where the westering sun might dry them quickly. Delightful chairs they were, once the property of Janet's grandmother, hand-made, with comfortable hollows, worn by much scrubbing on their firm, hard seats. Chairs of character and history, once dark-stained, but now rubbed to a pleasant, faded brown, running into soft cream where the brush had done its worst. Chairs of fancy as well as fact, capable, as Euan knew, of being all sorts of other things — coaches, pirate barques, horses in pair or tandem, prancing and curveting at the urge of whip and rein; pulpits, too; excellent pulpits never tipping under the most fervid

discourses and quite unharmed, save for a trifle of dirt, by the preacher's boots.

Janet set the last chair down with a gentle thud and surveyed the result of her labour with a contented eye. There is something singularly soul-satisfying in a freshly scrubbed kitchen. It shows for the work. It shines, it twinkles. Supper in it is a delight. To spread her sweet-smelling cloth upon that spotless table and to place upon it the cold meat and cheese, the home-made preserve and freshly baked scone, gave Janet a pleasant thrill. Had she spoken, she would probably have said that Saturday was a trying day and housework an endless task, but her eye would have convinced you of her deep satisfaction. Could any one in Blencarrow bake scone such as hers?

Euan answered the summons to supper promptly. Being mindful of favours to come, he wiped his boots without being told, not only on the soles but on the sides, prying out the caked mud on the underside of the heel. Decorously, he hung up his cap upon the nail provided and retired into the back bedroom to wash his hands with the sound of many waters. A faint smile flickered across Janet's primly schooled lips as she heard him, but if his father noticed anything unusual he gave no sign. Neither did he seem pleasantly conscious of his son's model deportment during grace. Euan began to fear that his extreme goodness was in danger of being wasted.

'I could eat another piece of meat, but I don't think I'd better,' said Euan in martyred tones, determined to focus attention.

Again Janet repressed a smile, and again Andrew paid no attention, save to place a suitable second portion of meat upon the martyr's plate.

'I hear,' said Andrew gravely, looking across at his wife, 'that the price of eggs has gone up. They are now fifteen cents the dozen.'

'A shameful price,' said Janet with conviction. Then, struck with the unusualness of her husband's knowledge, 'Who told you, Andrew? And how came you to remember it?'

Andrew's eyes, deep and blue, had a solemn twinkle. 'The matter,' he said, 'was brought to my attention by a committee of the Ladies' Aid, waiting on me as an elder with respect to the matter of increasing the minister's stipend.'

'Do you tell me so?' There was a pause as the enormity of the implication became plain to Janet. Then her dark eyes snapped. 'That'll be Betsy Macfarland!' she declared, not without relish. 'Tis just the daftlike thing you might expect — Euan that's your fourth scone! — That's what happens when a body like Betsy is put on committees. Now she'll be saying that she moved Andrew Cameron with the price of eggs.'

'No' — Andrew's blue twinkle deepened — 'the rise in the stipend was decided on before we knew about the price of eggs. But it might be well if the same were known. Mr. McKenzie is a man humble before God, but with a proper pride elsewhere. And the matter of his wage is one of justice, not generosity.'

'I'll see that they hear that,' said Janet after a considering pause. She was, you see, in a difficult position. As past president of the Ladies' Aid she might be expected to have feelings where any *faux pas* of that organization was concerned. On the other hand, Andrew Cameron was an elder and she was Andrew Cameron's wife. Her duty was clear. 'The woman's a fule,' she added as a sop to outraged propriety.

Euan sighed audibly. He had finished his second meat and almost finished his fourth scone and his feet ached with their unaccustomed effort of keeping still. He felt that he was bound to do something untoward in the next few min-

utes, but, just as he had almost given up hope, his father turned to him suddenly and with full attention.

‘Well, Euan?’ he said.

Euan opened his mouth, but closed it upon his last bite of scone. Now that his chance had come, he was not quick to take it. Why, he wondered, was it so hard to speak up to his father? It was not that he was afraid of him. Their relations were of the friendliest nature. No tyranny on Andrew’s part had ever endangered them. The boy knew instinctively that his father did not refuse anything for the sake of refusing, although no reasons were ever given. One might state one’s case with every assurance of fair dealing. But — and here came the rub — one had to be careful how one stated the case. Fair dealing was necessary here also — the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And that, as every boy knows, is sometimes embarrassing. There are ways of telling things without telling everything. Being a boy of fair resource, Euan could use these comfortable ways as well as another, but there was something in his father’s look, perfectly kind as it always was, which made glib speech falter. It was not that the look was penetrating or that it broke down reserves by force. It took nothing which was not offered. It only expected. And to deny that expectation was beyond the power of his son. Besides, it wouldn’t have helped, really. He always seemed to know, anyway. Euan, of course, did not formulate this, but he felt it, and he felt that in this lay one of the chief differences between his parents. His mother with her quick eyes and nimble brain was ‘knowing,’ but his father knew.

It is rude to speak with one’s mouth full, and Euan, finishing his bite of scone, determined to present the bare bones of his request and let it go at that.

‘I was thinking I would like to go to the singing school, Father.’

‘Surely. Why not?’ Andrew’s assent was instant and cordial.

'The child can't sing a note,' said Janet.

'The wood's all in,' said Euan.

'And the singing teacher won't want to be bothered with children that can't sing,' finished Janet. She knew that Euan was going, but the making of due objections is a proper thing.

'I was twelve yesterday,' reminded Euan. He, too, knew that he was going, but it is well to keep up one's end of an argument.

'You may go, but you'll be back and in your bed by ten,' said his father. 'Is there a fee, Janet?'

Mrs. Cameron thought there was no fee unless private lessons were included. 'Maybe he'll be wanting those next,' said she by way of having the last word.

Euan said 'Thank you,' and clapped his toecaps together with a sound of triumphing cymbals. It had been absurdly easy after all. His father had asked no questions. He had not said 'Why?' Perhaps things were more and more like that as one grew older. Perhaps next year, or the year after, or when he was twenty, he would just go on and do things without ever explaining, or even asking his father! Perhaps in those days he could just go and put on his Sunday boots without asking his mother! Perhaps —

He became abruptly aware that his father was looking at him. His mother had left the room on some errand to the pantry — oh, botheration! He raised his own eyes slowly.

'Well, Euan?' Surely the blue expectancy of his father's gaze had a far-away twinkle in it? To his utter discomfiture Euan felt a wave of colour invade his face. His feet shuffled.

Andrew's hand was in his pocket, and when he drew it out it held a coin.

'Seeing there is no fee,' said he, smiling, 'maybe you'd like to spend this on a bag of sweeties for the lassie.'

Lassie! How could he possibly have guessed?

CHAPTER TWO

How had his father known about Phemie?

Andrew had not used her name, but Euan felt sure that he knew what her name was. For, if not Phemie, who else? Euan was held by the delusion, common to all heart victims from the age of five, that a mistake regarding the identity of the beloved object is impossible. There is, naturally, no other. True, it was only lately that he had discovered Phemie himself. But that was a mystery. How he had been able to exist beside her for years without perceiving her entire unlikeness to every one else was something which he could not understand.

For Phemie was undoubtedly the most beautiful of girls. Just look at her! She was pleasingly small and round. (Was it possible that he was the same boy who had once called her 'Stumps'?) Her hair was — well, certainly not exactly red. It shone in the sun like brass wire with kinks in it. (If 'Frizz-Top' ever reminded him of his unenlightened past, his mind refused to recognize it.) Her eyes were blue and big and liable to become dewy with tears. ('Cry-Baby' — certainly not! He would slam any boy who said so.)

Phemie sat in the first row of the girls at school and Euan sat in the first row of the boys and just two desks behind. It was very wonderful.

Phemie was not brilliant. Mathematics troubled her. She simply couldn't. Why should she? — a girl like that! What a cute little nose she had!

Euan had become conscious of the nose and of all its accompanying wonders in a rather sudden fashion. It had happened one day in school when the sun shone directly on Phemie's desk. Euan, in an off moment, had stared at Phemie, and Phemie, turning had stared at Euan. Her blue

eyes, wide and misted (*not* watery), had met his and in them Euan had fancied an appeal. As if automatically, his lips had moved giving her the answer to the problem which it would presently be her lot to solve.

Euan hoarsely whispered behind his hand, '120 yards, 2 feet, 4 inches.' And when, a moment later, the teacher had said, 'Your turn, Phemie,' Phemie's throaty little voice had piped '120 yards, 2 feet, 4 inches,' without even a second's hesitation.

'Right!' said the teacher, surprised. 'Come and work it out on the board, Phemie.'

Well, Euan had hardly been to blame for that! A fellow couldn't foresee everything, and Phemie was too perfect a creature to bear malice.

This had happened three weeks ago, and for three weeks Euan had stared at Phemie and planned advances which he had not made. There had been an orange — to be offered in a casual way with an offhand 'Have a suck, Phemie?' But the proper moment had never come. There had been loiterings around the school-gate with the intent to say 'Hello, Phemie,' without seeming to intend to say it. But that chance, too, had not arrived. Euan had begun to feel the throes of hope deferred, and then, only yesterday, the head of golden kinks had turned his way and, quite naturally and as if nothing wonderful was happening, the throaty little voice had said, 'Going to singing school, Euan?'

Euan, by a miracle of self-control, had muttered, 'You going?'

The golden head had nodded. 'Yes, I am. You come on, too.'

It had been an invitation, no less.

But how had his father guessed it?

And how fortunate that it was not his mother who had guessed. For if his mother had guessed, she would have laughed. And if she had laughed, Euan could not have

borne it. His father had at least treated him as man to man.

Well, the main thing was that he was going. Presently he would be there. He felt the bag of sweets in his pocket — cream almonds, they were, pink-and-white ones — the colour scheme unconsciously a tribute to Phemie. Euan clutched them with a warm, damp hand. He was determined that they should not suffer the fate of the orange. No more hesitation! He settled his cap with an air.

The singing school was held at that time in the old frame hall on Mundie Street, once occupied by the Primitive Methodists, now vanished. Why Primitive, and why vanished, Euan did not know. But the Hall, seated with benches and heated by a great round stove with drums, made an excellent singing school. No one in Blencarrow was fussy about acoustics. Besides the benches, the hall contained a small platform for the organ and possible orchestra and a music-stand for Mr. Williams who conducted the singing. Its use was donated by Joseph Tiddy, twice ex-mayor, who through devious byways of interest and principle had become its owner.

How pleasant it was to be out on Saturday Night! To be out, not as a small boy playing black-lie-low in an empty lot, but as a person in a clean shirt, buttoned coat, and Sunday boots. Saturday Night was always spoken as if in capitals by Blencarrow. It was as if an eighth and very special day, hidden for ages among the seven, had been rescued from obscurity for Blencarrow's special needs. All the stores kept open until ten o'clock. The whole main street was lined with shining windows — at least the south side was, and, of late, even the north side was brightening up. From Tom Forbes' grocery store at the top of the hill to Little Billy Henderson's tailor shop, two blocks past the post-office, was a perfect riot of night life. Thrilling!

Every one was downtown. The Madock Organ Company paid its men on Saturday and so did the Tiddy Agricultural

Implements. So the stores were full. Those who did not buy watched others buying, and social reunions were constant at counters and corners. The long double step, higher at one end, which ran along the front of Roger MacIvor's harness shop (sign of the bay horse on wheels), was a recognized grandstand for the town's oldest citizens. There they sat and smoked and watched the world go by very much as one might do on a boulevard in Paris (France).

Newspapers had nothing on Roger MacIvor's Step. Newspapers sometimes miss something, the Step, never. Even the Reverend Ronald McKenzie had been known to pause there for a chat upon occasion of desiring information hard to come by, and Andrew Cameron, though seldom sitting upon the Step itself, would smoke a pipe at times leaning against the bay horse, while Janet did some shopping at Caldicott's across the way.

Euan walked all four blocks of Centre Street with serious delight. Then, on the brow of the hill, where the shops ended, he turned into the darker quiet of Yorke Avenue. Here, too, it was Saturday Night, and young Blencarrow was engaged in its pleasant weekly promenade 'round the block.' Arm in arm, they walked — or almost. Euan, with a small boy's uncanny sight, recognized several couples. In times past he would certainly have whistled (just to let them know), but to-night — no. Was he not one with them? That is to say, in a way and after a fashion. Of course he would never be silly enough to let a girl hang on his arm.

Before the singing school stood an ornamental iron post supporting a frosted globe of mellow gaslight, the same erected by subscription. But when Euan turned the corner, the circle of its radiance was empty. There was no one on the Hall steps, either. Euan, it appeared, was early. But better early than never. He advanced cautiously and peered in at the open door of the Hall. The gas inside was lighted, but not turned up. He must be very early, indeed, for there

was no one there. At least he thought there was no one, but, as he advanced between the benches, a slight swishing sound seemed to hint otherwise, and suddenly he caught a glimpse of a girl's skirt whisking quickly behind the organ.

Euan's heart (or something) flew to his throat and hammered there. Could the girl be Phemie? Had Phemie, too, come early — no, of course it was not Phemie. The skirt had been of faded blue, while Phemie's dress, he knew, was gloriously pink. Kathrine Fenwell, then? Yes, it must be Kathrine. She alone wore that curious faded blue. His throat ceased to trouble him. Kathrine Fenwell was merely a girl as other girls. But what was she doing behind the organ?

'Hi, Kathy, I saw you! Come on out,' he commanded.

There was a small silence. Then, 'Go on out yourself,' said a girl's voice very clear and decided. 'You've no right in here till a quarter to eight.'

The cheek of her!

With one agile bound Euan was over the two front benches. Another bound landed him upon the low platform. Only one gasjet was lit here and behind the organ was shadow. But in the shadow, Euan saw a surprising thing — a girl of his own age, with her blue skirt pinned up over a dark petticoat, gathering a pile of waste paper and dust with a battered dustpan.

The sight held him petrified with the shame of seeing it — all unwittingly he had caught Kathrine Fenwell sweeping out the Hall!

Why hadn't he stopped to think? Why hadn't he guessed it? He remembered, now, having heard that Gilbert Fenwell, Kathy's father, had 'come down' to doing janitor work. He remembered the lowered tones of the woman who said it and his mother's sharp retort that any kind of decent labour would be a 'come up' for Gilbert Fenwell — and that all she wondered was who would do the work for him?

And here was Kathrine, that proud little piece, sweeping out a public hall!

Euan grew very red and gulped miserably.

'Please stand out of the light,' ordered the clear voice.

Euan mechanically moved aside, and Kathrine Fenwell, with his startled eyes upon her, gathered up the remaining dust and rose without a tremor. But let no one underestimate the tragedies of childhood.

'W-where is your father?' asked Euan, stammering.

It was the wrong thing to say. The Fenwells were known to have nice manners, but Kathrine's answer was instant and classical.

'None of your business!' said she.

She had moved from behind the organ now and faced him in the dim gaslight. Euan realized that, though they had always known each other, he was seeing her for the first time. What was the matter with him, anyway? First Phemie and now Kathrine. Only, of course, there was a great difference. Kathrine had dark hair. She was almost as tall as he, and thin. Her cheeks had sharp curves, and her eyes were not round and wide-open, but long and half hidden by dark lashes. He couldn't tell what colour they were, but at present they were lit with angry fire.

'What are you going to do with that?' asked Euan, pointing to the betraying dustpan. His practical idea was that she had better do something with it quickly. People might come in at any moment. His outstretched hand offered aid.

'If you will stand out of the way, you'll see,' said Kathrine, ignoring the hand.

Euan stood out of the way. The girl moved easily, as if disdaining hurry, toward the big, round stove. Evidently its pre-winter use was that of a dustbin. But here her pride had a fall, for the door was too small for the dustpan and the dustpan too full for experiment.

'You'll need to slide off the top,' instructed Euan. She couldn't do it, he felt sure, and that would be a good thing. He wouldn't mind helping her if she asked for help. And he wished she would hurry. But she didn't hurry, and she did not ask. Very carefully she placed the full pan upon a bench and prepared to climb upon another. She was going to slide off the top herself!

Euan vaulted a few benches and had the stove uncovered before she knew he had left the platform.

'Give it here!' he demanded in a tone which tolerated no nonsense.

Kathrine handed up the pan. And then, just as he was tipping it neatly in, a stifled 'Oh!' made him glance aside. There, wide-eyed in the doorway, stood Phemie.

'Look out, it's spilling!' came in angry warning from Kathrine. Euan collected himself. He thought quickly. Phemie had not seen Kathrine. The stove stood between them. He bent his head.

'It's Phemie Ellis in the door,' he whispered, 'and your skirt's pinned up.'

Kathrine stamped her foot. 'Give me that pan!' she said. Her voice was clear, even loud. Then, in full sight of Phemie, she walked, skirt up, dustpan in one hand and broom in the other, the open length of the hall.

And Phemie giggled.

That was all for the moment. Just then Mr. Williams entered, followed by some of the singing school. The gas flared up. The grown-ups were laughing and talking. They may have seen the three children, but they certainly saw nothing else. For between the worlds of twelve and twenty is a great gulf fixed.

Euan sought a bench disconsolately. The night was spoiled for him. He didn't know why. It ought to have been a perfect night, for all the things which he had intended to do, he did with unexpected ease. He sat near Phemie. Not

beside her — that would have been silly — but behind her and slightly to the side so that she could speak to him if she wished by turning her head. She did turn her head and she did speak to him. She said:

‘Wasn’t it f-funny?’

‘What?’ asked Euan.

Phemie giggled. ‘You know!’

‘I don’t,’ said Euan.

‘Why — Kathy Fenwell cleaning out the Hall!’

‘She wasn’t,’ said Euan. He was a truthful boy and he knew the lie was useless. Yet he lied instantly and with fervour.

‘Oh, Euan Cameron, she was too!’

‘Silence, please!’ Mr. Williams tapped the desk and cleared his throat. ‘We will now come to order. I see we have some new members with us. Will all the new members please rise and come forward to the front row?’

Several new members, feeling very new indeed, rose and went sheepishly forward.

‘The children present had better come forward too.’

Euan looked condescendingly around. But he saw no children. Great Scot! Could the man be referring to persons of twelve years of age?

‘Quickly, please.’

Apparently he could. Euan wavered to his feet. He hadn’t bargained for this. But Phemie, sly thing, had expected it. Already she was moving sedately up the aisle. Could he cut it and run? — No, he couldn’t — Well, luckily he wasn’t the only one. Johnnie Carter was standing up and Ellen Nichol and — oh, the relief of it — Garry Emigh, who must have come in at the last moment. Garry Emigh was Euan’s ‘special.’ Things couldn’t be too bad with Garry to share them.

But they were going to be bad enough. Mr. Williams inserted a finger between his collar and his neck as if to prepare

a gangway, cleared his throat again and took a tuning-fork from his pocket.

'If the class will oblige me with perfect silence,' he said, 'per-fect silence, we will try the voices of our new members. The youngest first. Now, little girl — you with the pink dress — your name is? . . . Phemie? . . . oh, Euphemia, no doubt . . . Ellis, do you say? . . . Euphemia Ellis . . . Now, Euphemia, let us hear you sound low 'do.'

He touched the fork with his teeth.

'Do-o,' sounded Mr. Williams with raised finger.

'Do-o,' echoed Phemie's throaty little voice.

'Hum!' said Mr. Williams. 'Now the octave — do — do!'

'Do — do,' trilled Phemie, very squeaky.

'Hum! Mouth open, please. A long breath. Now again, "do — do" . . . that's better. Soprano, I think. Next.'

Euan looked desperately at the door. But there were chairs in the aisles now.

'Per-fect silence,' said Mr. Williams. 'Whom have we next? Ah, I see. Elder Cameron's son. Euan, is it? Now then, Euan, "do" — hold the note.'

'Do,' said Euan conversationally.

'What? . . . oh, not that way! Don't say it! Sing it! Mouth open, child. Shoulders back. A long breath. Now, the octave "do — do"!'

Euan, scarlet, 'do — do'd.'

A ripple passed over the room. Phemie giggled.

'Hum!' said Mr. Williams. 'We must try again, Euan. Another time. Yes. Privately, perhaps. Next.'

Garry was next. He had managed to squeeze in beside Euan. And he had scowled awfully at Phemie when she giggled. Garry was a good singer. He sang in the choir in his uncle's church. His uncle was the Reverend James Dwight, Rector of the Church of England. And he was a year older than Euan. Perhaps he was going to be a musician when he grew up.

But to-night he sang flat. At least Mr. Williams, in surprise, said he sang flat. Euan didn't know what flat was. But he did know that Garry was being a true friend. And his heart felt warm. His lacerated feelings were soothed. Boys are much nicer than girls, anyway. Garry grinned at him cheerfully as he sat down.

'Next!' said Mr. Williams. And, would you believe it, Kathrine Fenwell was next. She had put on a hat and unpinned her skirt and was staying for the singing in the very Hall which she had lately swept. Moreover, she was not in the least embarrassed. Her lips, which were red but much tighter than Phemie's, were closely pressed together. She looked neither to the right nor left and she 'do — do'd' without a quiver. She even 'held the note.' Mr. Williams said, 'Very good.' The pride of some people!

'Think of her staying!' whispered Phemie.

'Why shouldn't she?' Euan's usually set, fair mind was like a twirling weather-vane.

'Silence!' said Mr. Williams. 'We will take number five as an opening chorus.'

The singing school, controlled by the tapping of Mr. Williams, burst into song with 'Men of Harlech.'

Men of Harlech! march to glory!
Victory is hovering o'er ye,
Bright-eyed Freedom stands before ye,
Hear ye not her call?

Euan thrilled; there was something in singing after all.

Echoes loudly waking . . .

Tap, tap, tap! Why was Mr. Williams stopping them? The bass a note behind? Euan hadn't noticed it. Now they were off again . . .

Echoes loudly waking,
Hill and valley shaking,
Till the sound spreads wide around,
The Saxon courage breaking!

Why, it was grand! Euan began to sing too. It was glorious to join one's voice to that volume of sound. And Euan's voice, whatever its deficiencies, was strong.

Our foes on every side assailing,
Forward press with heart unfailing,
Till invaders learn —

Tap, tap! TAP!

What was the matter now; why couldn't he let them get on with it — ?

'I will request the first row not to sing this time. Hum!' said Mr. Williams.

'He means you, Euan,' whispered Phemie, giggling.

Euan, scarlet, recognized that this was even so.

Was it possible that he had ever admired Phemie?

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT was the matter with the house? Euan, waking suddenly as always, was conscious of a lack of something. Then he remembered. It was Sunday.

And last night had been Saturday Night, and last night — oh, well, he was done with girls! Absolutely and forever done with girls.

From the position of the autumn sun upon the window-sill, he gathered that it must be after eight. In a few moments his father would rise, for, although one may rest somewhat longer on the day of rest, laziness is a thing not to be tolerated at any time. Besides, morning prayers were longer on Sunday, and, although church did not 'go in' until eleven, the preparations for it must not be hurried lest the mind be distracted by worldly things. Euan gave vent to a prodigious yawn.

But what *was* wrong, anyway? Something more than the Sabbath quiet of the house . . . something missing . . . lost . . . Phemie? . . . yes, undoubtedly Phemie.

'And a good thing, too!' muttered Euan. How had he ever been such a ninny? Had Garry noticed? He hoped to goodness Garry hadn't noticed. His aberration, brief and inexplicable, was over. He was done with girls.

Having affirmed this solemnly to the ceiling, he felt more cheerful. The world, which had threatened to disintegrate, joined together again, round and compact, a boy's world. A world for himself and Garry and Con-of-the-Woods and perhaps a few others, all boys. His eye fell upon a whitey brown paper protruding from his jacket pocket. The cream almonds! He had forgotten the cream almonds. How fortunate! Everything was really quite all right. Very

carefully he drew them out so that the paper might not crackle . . .

At breakfast that morning Euan could eat only one plate of porridge. His mother looked at him thoughtfully. It was a good thing that his mother was not the soppy kind. He had washed his face carefully, but if she had kissed him —

‘Are you not feeling yourself, Euan?’ asked Janet.

Euan, with an air of modest fortitude, guessed that he would be feeling all right to-morrow.

‘Have you a pain anywhere?’

Euan considered — in the case of a bad pain church was sometimes remitted. And there certainly was a certain tightness — ‘It’s not a very bad pain,’ he began, and then, as his father’s deep blue gaze was turned upon him, ‘Maybe it’s not exactly a pain,’ he ended tamely.

‘It will be much better after church,’ said Andrew mildly. Euan sighed.

He was glad that he had saved a few of the almonds. Not only had he eaten all he could at the time, but an almond or two in the pocket of a Sunday coat is a great help. An almond is not hard and crackly like sour-drops, nor sucky like gum-drops, nor smelly like peppermints, nor conspicuous like bull’s-eyes — if one is careful to keep it out of one’s cheek.

If only Garry went to church, too, it wouldn’t be so bad. But Garry went to the Church of England, on account of his uncle. Garry’s mother had been the uncle’s sister and had left Garry to his uncle when she died. The two of them lived at the Rectory with Mrs. Binns. Garry’s uncle had never got married. He didn’t believe in it. That is, he didn’t believe that ministers should get married. Garry said that he said it distracted them from their work. But that was silly because the Reverend Ronald McKenzie was married and was not distracted at all — quite the contrary.

Some one had to keep house, didn’t they? Mrs. McKenzie

did it for Mr. McKenzie and Mrs. Binns kept house at the Rectory, and a nice mess she made of it. Why Garry stood it, Euan didn't know. But Garry had explained that his uncle seldom thought about things to eat, and, though he himself often thought about them, he had found out that it was better to keep his thoughts to himself. Mrs. Binns had feelings of the tenderest and to hurt Mrs. Binns' feelings meant short commons for days afterwards. It was, according to that injured lady, a matter of atmosphere. 'Seeings as 'ow trust and 'armony is necessary to all good feelings and nobody can be hexpected to do otherwise,' said Mrs. Binns.

Given these essentials, which meant a free hand and no questions asked, Mrs. Binns did well. At least there was a sliding scale of wellness, beginning with very well for Mrs. Binns, fairly well for the Reverend James Dwight, and well enough for Garry.

For Euan this would never have done — he being energetically conscious of a world to be remoulded nearer to the heart's desire. Had he been in Garry's place he would certainly have had a shy at remoulding Mrs. Binns. But Garry was like his uncle, anything for peace.

Euan had attended Garry's church once, but once only. On that occasion he had been confused to the point of exasperation by the standing up and the kneeling down. That the congregation should take part in the church service, otherwise than by singing, offended his sense of fitness. The service proper surely belonged to the minister. Certainly nobody ever dared to interrupt Mr. McKenzie. The chanting he had rather liked, if they would only keep still while they were doing it. But the wearing of vestments had embarrassed him dreadfully. It had seemed like grown men playing at dressing up. Such a foolishness!

The one thing which had really made an impression had been Garry's behaviour. Garry had been very quiet. He had acted as if he liked it. He had been able to find all the

places in the prayer book. He had felt no embarrassment in reading aloud. He had not sucked a peppermint and he had not yawned. Also, there had been a look on him — oh, a queer kind of look. Was it possible that Garry was 'saved'? Surely Garry was much too young to be 'saved'? Euan felt very uncomfortable.

Garry had come once to Euan's church, too. He had been abstracted afterwards, an attitude which Euan had resented. He, himself, had had his manners when he visited Garry's church and had said afterwards that he had 'enjoyed it very much.' Garry might at least have done the same. But he had said nothing, and Euan had at last burst out:

'It's different from your church, but it's just as good.'

'It's for different people,' said Gary.

'It's for sensible people,' said Euan, conscious, suddenly, of partisanship.

Garry generously ignored this. 'Yours has a lot more sermon,' he admitted.

Euan looked at him doubtfully. He had not always seen in this an undiluted blessing. Nevertheless:

'That's what church is for,' he declared stoutly.

'Not ours,' said Garry.

'What's yours for, then?'

But Garry had blushed and hesitated and looked queer again. 'It's to w-worship God,' he had blurted out . . . the silly thing! As if that were any difference! Wasn't Mr. McKenzie's sermon worshipping God? There wasn't anybody in Blencarrow who could worship God better than Mr. McKenzie.

But on this particular Sunday Euan reverted to his friend's attitude with a certain sympathy. It was a glorious autumn morning. There was a haze in the air, a beautiful, vague blueness against which the half-bared branches of the maple trees made faint tracery. Here and there flamed a burning

bush. Had Moses' bush looked like that? The feet fell softly on sidewalks of damp leaves. The sun shone, friendly, but remote. There was a delicious earthy smell. But inside the church it was close with the closeness of a week of closed windows.

During the second and longer prayer, Euan, sitting decorously with elbow on hymnbook, and fingers across closed eyes, fell peacefully asleep. Whereupon the traitorous hymnbook fell upon the floor with a thud, and Euan's head pitched forward with a dislocating jerk. His father's end of the pew squeaked ominously. It was one of those misfortunate happenings which are always taking place in church, and Euan's only comfort was that time had moved during his nap, for from 'fruitful fields' Mr. McKenzie had proceeded to 'the Government and all-those-in-authority-over-us.'

Presently they sang. At least the congregation sang and Euan's father and mother sang. Euan was shy of singing since last night. He preferred to watch and listen and to make a bet with himself who would hold the end notes longest. It was a psalm they were singing and very interesting, for the older people in the congregation liked their psalms long-drawn-out in the ends, whereas Mr. Williams and the organist were breathless and red-faced with the effort to 'keep up the time.' To any one not immersed in praise the result was fascinating. But that morning Euan was not to continue this diversion to its end, for in the middle of the last verse a terrifying thing happened. Phemie Ellis turned round in the Ellis pew and openly smiled at him.

Had the girl no sense at all? Euan felt his face grow furiously red. He frowned horribly. Geewhicker! the girl would have the whole church looking at them! Had she no propriety whatever? He sank into his seat, limp and perspiring.

For once the sermon came as a relief. Phemie couldn't turn round during the sermon. Euan hoped it would be a

nice loud one. Something about the Priests of Baal, perhaps. Mr. McKenzie was fine on the Priests of Baal. It might serve to take his mind off Phemie. But, of course, just because he needed it, it wasn't that kind at all. It was the quiet kind with no people in, no fighting, nothing. Euan coughed and raised his clean handkerchief to his lips. The handkerchief contained a pink cream almond. Thereafter, save for certain convulsive movements of his throat, he was still. The delicious melting cream sucked slowly down, the pulpit at which he solemnly stared grew misty, the minister's voice became a pleasant monotony, far-away, faint . . . peace descended . . .

Euan was in a meadow picking a bouquet of cream almonds, pink-and-white bees were humming cheerfully, buzz, buzz . . . very delightful . . . but the buzzing was growing louder . . . and louder . . . and louder . . . and . . . BANG!

Mr. McKenzie had struck the desk a resounding blow. You never knew when he was going to do it. It really wasn't safe to go to sleep at all.

The start sent the, as yet unbitten, nut of Euan's almond into his throat, where it stuck firmly. Frightful noises proceeded from his windpipe, his head was bursting, he waved feeble hands . . . Ach! a smart smack between the shoulders, a perfectly good almond-nut irretrievably lost, a stupendous gasp as breath returned — and perspiring shame for the rest of the service.

It wasn't exactly Euan's lucky day.

With the benediction came a new anxiety. What if his mother were to stop by, or near, Mrs. Ellis? If they met at the church door, she might easily do so, and if she did, Phemie might — well, judging from the behaviour in church, Phemie might do anything.

He wished his mother were not an elder's wife whose duty it was to speak to people. He hoped if she spoke to any one

to-day it would be to some one who hadn't any daughters. Since last night he felt safer in the company of grown-ups. But ill luck was surely at his elbow. Mrs. Cameron with a peremptory, 'Come, Euan,' made directly toward Mrs. Ellis and an encounter would have been inevitable had not another face suddenly diverted her attention.

'I declare,' said Mrs. Cameron, 'there's Mrs. Fenwell and her little girl in Minna Irving's pew. Wait you for me, Andrew. Euan, come with me.'

It was apparent that Mrs. Fenwell was a more important duty than Mrs. Ellis, just as the one sinner engages the attention of the angels in preference to the waiting just. Not that Mrs. Fenwell, like her husband, was a sinner. Far from it. But she was an 'adherent,' whereas Mrs. Ellis was a church member. Also, she seldom came to church, whereas Mrs. Ellis never stayed away. Also, she was suspected of having 'views.' Nobody could suspect Mrs. Ellis of views. The duty of the elder's wife was clear.

'I hope this fine weather finds you feeling more yourself, Mrs. Fenwell?' said Mrs. Cameron, shaking hands. It was tactfully taken for granted that Mrs. Fenwell would have come to church oftener if she had been in robust health.

'Thank you, I am quite well.' Mrs. Fenwell's voice was low and pleasant. There was a fugitive accent, too, musical and strange. It was reported that she was of foreign parentage and had once been a singer. But she had lived with old Mrs. Danvers as a kind of lady companion and it was from there that Gilbert Fenwell had married her — poor thing. Certainly she had the remains of a cultivated voice, just as she had the remains of beauty and, no doubt, of many other things.

'It is so nice to see you in church,' said Mrs. Cameron, 'and little Gilda, too.'

'This is Kathrine, not Gilda,' said Mrs. Fenwell, and something in her tone had subtly changed. 'She wanted to

come,' she added rather inconsequently, covering Mrs. Cameron's chagrin at her blunder.

Euan, whose eyes had been bent carefully upon his boots, looked up suspiciously. But Kathrine was not looking at him. He might not have existed as far as she was concerned.

'I wish,' said his mother severely, 'that I could say the same of Euan.'

Mrs. Fenwell looked at Euan and smiled. It was an understanding smile, and Euan, with his newly awakened susceptibility, decided that she might be quite nice.

'Boys don't — usually,' she said.

Euan wondered why he had never noticed how awfully pretty she must have been once — ages ago, of course —

'Euan.'

It was only a whisper and it came from behind him. But Euan did not need to turn to know whose voice it was. Nor did he wait for a second summons.

'Where are you going, Euan?' His mother's voice brought him up sharply.

'Just — going on,' said Euan.

'Who with?'

Euan glanced around desperately. He knew if he said, 'With myself,' he would be denounced as impudent and told to stay where he was. And if he stayed where he was —

'I was going on with K-Kathy,' he stammered, and then froze with terror.

Would the girl give him away? . . . no. She stared a little in sober surprise. But she moved toward him. Euan sighed with relief. Anything was better than Phemie.

'What did you do that for?' asked Kathrine, frowning, when they were out of hearing.

'Oh, well, they'll talk all day,' said Euan gloomily.

'My mother never talks all day.'

'Oh, well, she might.'

'Wasn't Phemie Ellis calling you?' asked Kathrine curiously.

'I don't care whether she was or not.'

'Are you afraid of Phemie?' with more interest.

'I'm not afraid of anybody,' gloomily.

'Don't you like her because her hair's red?'

'It isn't red,' said Euan; but this was the result of habit, there was no conviction in it. Euan had admitted to himself that morning that Phemie's hair was red.

'It is,' said Kathrine, 'but some red hair is very nice. Not the kind Phemie has. My sister Gilda has the nice kind — like this —'

She opened her Bible and between the maps of Palestine at the back lay a coil of hair that glinted like copper in the sun. Euan scarcely looked at it.

'Your sister *who*?' he asked vaguely.

Kathrine closed the Bible with a snap.

'I'd kind of forgotten you had a sister,' explained Euan politely. 'She doesn't live at your house, does she?'

'She lives with my cousin Elizabeth,' said Kathrine. Her tone was cold.

'Why doesn't your mother bring her home?' There was no malice in this. Euan was merely making conversation. But he saw at once that he had better have left it unmade. Kathrine's narrow eyes snapped.

'I shan't tell you,' she said, tight-lipped.

A tone like that, naturally, could not be ignored. Euan was quick with the obvious retort.

'You don't need to. I know.'

'You don't!'

'I do. It's because —' Euan, as the forgotten memory came back would have been glad to ignore it, but he had gone too far to back down now. 'It's because she's afraid of your father,' he finished in a rush.

'It's not — it's not!' declared Kathrine passionately . . .
'Who told you?' she added in a funny, breathless voice.

Euan did not like that voice at all.

'Oh — I guess I just made it up,' he said.

'You didn't make it up.'

'Well, I guess it wasn't your folks they were talking about, anyway.'

'Yes it was. Who said it?'

'I don't know. Honest, Kathy, cross my heart; I don't.'

'What else did they say?'

'Nothing.'

'Please, Euan, tell me?'

What strange eyes she had — so long and fringy! And he could see their colour now — like some of the pansies in his garden.

'Nothing — much,' said Euan, weakening.

'I want to know.'

Euan wiggled. 'You won't like it,' he warned, 'and, besides, it's silly. They say your sister doesn't come home because your father gets — gets —'

'Drunk,' helped Kathrine. 'Go on!'

'Gets drunk and that once he *hit* her — when he didn't know it, of course — that Mrs. McCorquodale will say anything!' finished Euan with lofty scorn.

Kathrine was looking the other way.

'Is that all?' she demanded.

'Y-es. Except that she turned and bit him — served him right!' said Euan valorously.

'Oh,' breathed Kathrine, 'aren't people dreadful?'

'Shucks!' said Euan, 'what do you care?'

'I don't!' said Kathrine. Her small chin went up. 'But if you had McCorquodales living opposite to you, you'd want to kill them, too, I guess.'

'I'd move first,' said Euan pacifically. 'Why don't you move, Kathy?'

This suggestion, so eminently practical, met with no favour at all. Its recipient merely requested Euan not to be silly.

'You turn off here, don't you?' she asked as they reached the corner.

'No, I don't,' said Euan. 'I'm going down to meet Garry Emigh.'

'Good-bye, then,' said Kathrine pointedly.

'I can go past your house if you like.'

'I'm not going home,' with reserve; 'I'm going to wait here for Mother.'

Euan touched his cap awkwardly. He usually remembered to do this on Sunday.

'All right!' he said with relief. 'See you at school to-morrow.'

The phrase, of course, was purely polite and rhetorical. At school to-morrow Euan had no intention of seeing Kathrine or any of her annoying sex. More than ever he was done with girls.

CHAPTER FOUR

THERE were several show places in Blencarrow, notably the residence of Mr. Joseph Tiddy, but the Fenwell house held the distinction of being the town's only curiosity. It was not so much a house as a half-house, the front half being non-existent save as a tracing on a blue-print. The back half, arrested abruptly in its normal growth, had remained fixed, as by some strange enchantment, in all the ugliness of outraged proportion. At first, scaffolds had decorated it, but, bit by bit, the scaffolding had disappeared and nothing had taken its place. No steps below, or eaves above, broke the wide flatness of its face. The front door was not properly a front door, but a door leading into a hallway that was not there. The windows were not windows really, but glassed-in entrances to dining-rooms and drawing-rooms — which lived and had their being in a fourth dimension.

Upstairs — that is, upstairs in the blue-print — there had been three bedrooms, two small and one large, and a wide hallway into which the hallway already existent would have opened. This accounted for one of the principal oddities of this odd house — a door in the centre of the second story which opened out upon nothing. Because it had been temporary once, and equally because it had become permanent now, this door had never been provided with a balcony or ledge. Any one attempting to take advantage of its purposes as a door would have walked unhindered into thin air.

Besides being of no shape, the Fenwell house was of no colour either. One does not paint a half-house and one cannot paint a whole house which isn't there. This is logic, and what was true of the paint was true of all those other finishings to which well-built-up houses are accustomed. Of these deficiencies the house itself seemed shamedly aware. It

stood well back in its neglected garden, the ghost of something once new and fresh and promising. On its strange, flat face was a negation of all hope. It was a house which had given itself up.

Blencarrow had given it up also. While the scaffolding still stood, Blencarrow had pointed it out to strangers as 'the unfinished Fenwell place.' But this they did no longer, for a thing which never will be finished is the most finished thing of all.

Only in the mind of one man did the house still live as a house and not as an abortion; and this man was its owner, Gilbert Fenwell. Blencarrow was well aware of this absurdity, since Gilbert, when he was 'well soaked,' had no secrets from any one. On these occasions he boasted and, as he boasted, the house he had never built grew and took on form and comeliness, and, if thoughts are things, became as much a reality as Joseph Tiddy's residence or the Town Hall. This, Blencarrow found amusing, especially, when rumour added that the upstairs door, which led into the atmosphere, had to be kept locked lest some night Gilbert's thought might take a fancy to sleep in one of its large front rooms, and the triumph of matter over mind be unpleasantly demonstrated.

There were not wanting persons of philosophic mind in Blencarrow who saw some analogy between Gilbert Fenwell and his house. These were mostly old folk who remembered his father. They would tell you, shaking their heads, that, of all strange things, inheritance, or the lack of it, is the strangest. How old Colonel Fenwell could have had a son like Gilbert was 'a teaser.' True, the Colonel had been no farmer and his goodly acres had wasted under his untutored care, but even Blencarrow would admit that this might be a misfortune, not a fault. True, also, the Colonel had been a hard drinker, but what could you expect in a day when every one drank hard? Besides, the Colonel always carried his liquor

like a gentleman. And if he drank hard he worked hard, too — worked hard and lived straight and never blamed others for his own mistakes. Not a bad sort of father, take him all round, but — look at his son!

Proceeding to look at the son, Blencarrow found little worth looking at. Even the earliest accounts of Gilbert held little that was good — if one excepts good looks. He had been a headstrong boy, idle, mischievous, subject to strange rages. Sent early to school in England, bad reports of his school life had culminated in a sudden return which challenged gossip. Development, plainly, had not meant improvement. The unmanageable child had grown into an irresponsible youth. Handsome and reckless and lazy, he was utterly out of place in a growing community which had no use and small patience for wasters.

Yet, in those earlier days, there had been those who believed that young Fenwell was worth watching. 'The lad has good blood, he may go far,' they said. Wilder young sprigs than he had been known to settle down. Women, especially, believed this. The younger Fenwell was effective with women. His way with them was never to offer any excuse. They might take him or leave him — and he was very seldom left. If he were to marry well, they agreed, it would make all the difference. And they saw to it that he did not lack for opportunity. Can you blame them for a revulsion of feeling when these opportunities were one and all neglected?

Barely a year after the old Colonel's death, Gilbert had married, but his bride had not been chosen from the eligible maidens of the countryside. In this, as in everything else, he had followed a wavering fancy, choosing, to fill his mother's place, a young woman of whom nobody in Blencarrow had ever heard. This, of course, in a Pickwickian sense, for the new Mrs. Fenwell was not quite so unknown as all that. She had been, so Blencarrow understood, a lady companion

to old Mrs. Danvers, being herself a distant relative of the Danvers family (one of whom had regrettably married a person of foreign blood). This accounted for her artistic tendencies and for the fact that she had been educated for the concert stage until some throat trouble had made a singer's life impossible.

This marriage, so unexpected, struck the first blow at Gilbert's brief prestige. Being no longer eligible he ceased to be interesting. Those who had credited him with a touch of genius became increasingly doubtful. But the few who had his interests really at heart felt that now, if ever, he would have his chance. With a young wife to provide for and with the old Colonel's affairs in a sad muddle, Gilbert might brace up. Faced with the alternatives of work or poverty, he must show the sturdy material of which he was made. And for a time it looked as if he might do so. The farm sold for a surprisingly good figure and a legacy from an uncle in England lent its timely assistance. With some small blowing of trumpets, Gilbert entered the world of business, and accurate knowledge of his affairs passed beyond Blencarrow's ken.

These were the days when the financial world talked in whispers of Big Business. Gilbert Fenwell talked of it, too — and not in whispers. Then he began to build his house. It was to be — he made no secret of it — a very fine thing as houses go. Something to which the Town might point with pride — while naturally not expecting its owner to spend much of his time in it. Big Business gravitates to cities and Gilbert's affairs took him very often far afield. They were connected largely with companies represented by new and gorgeous offices and attractive stationery.

Then, without warning, work on the new house stopped. Gilbert, it was understood, felt that, after all, a house in Blencarrow might be a mistake. He might have to move to the city at any time. Big Business demanded a man's whole attention. Blencarrow, somewhat awed, suspended judgment.

The fates were not so kind. Their judgment was swift and their verdict final. They did not seem to bother over Gilbert Fenwell at all, but wiped him off the financial map as carelessly as a child rubs out a name upon a slate. Down from the blue he came like the stick of a skyrocket. No one seemed to know exactly what happened, except that, abruptly, Gilbert was back in Blencarrow, having left most of his money and all of his reputation behind him.

For some years he had muddled along, living with his wife and baby girl in the unfinished house. Trying one thing after another, in a constantly descending scale, he antagonized every one by a pride of manner equalled only by a poverty of everything else. He drank heavily. Not as his father had done, with a level glass and a level head, but continuously, soakingly. The black humours, so noticeable in him as a child, returned. Children and animals learned to flee before him. There were whispers of drugs, as distinct from decent whiskey, which thoroughly shocked Blencarrow — and at the same time added an unholy interest to an otherwise too familiar spectacle.

The last of his ventures to come remotely within the scope of business was the keeping of a livery stable. He understood horses. But it takes a fairly sober man to make even a livery stable pay. Gilbert's stable lasted one summer season, but did not know a second spring. He was left with two cart horses and a Cameron wagon (unpaid for), and with these he made shift to do what 'carting' was thrust upon him. Otherwise he loafed. Then Mrs. Fenwell, recovering slowly from the birth of her second child, began to 'take in a little sewing,' and Blencarrow felt that the last word had been said.

Unfortunately the saying of the last word does not settle the score — life goes on precisely as if no one had said it. Gilbert Fenwell, as a possibility, had ceased to be, but Gilbert Fenwell, as an actuality, lived on.

The girl who had married him lived on too. It is difficult to say when a person really dies. Death, they say, is only a change. Perhaps it is. Certainly those who had known Lucia Danvers would never have known Lucia Fenwell. Women make these mistakes. And pay for them. Lucia paid quietly, but to the last farthing.

She had her children, of course, and it is a great thing for a woman to have children. Unless she feels that perhaps she shouldn't have had them. Lucia felt like that. Seeing Gilbert as she came to see him, she could hardly escape it. Nor did she understand those theories of heredity which comfort (or annoy) by reminding us that children have other ancestors besides their fathers. Therefore, the more she loved her children, the more she paid.

Kathrine had come first — a quiet, shining-eyed baby with a shock of dark hair. Gilbert, then in the glory of his skyrocketing, had been boisterous about her. Had tossed and dandled her at the risk of an injured spine; had teased and frightened her, roaring with laughter at her fear. But the baby had been so quiet that the sport had palled. 'A little black imp,' he came to call her, and, later, 'little black devil.' The names meant nothing to her baby mind. Or perhaps they did. When she learned to toddle, she did not avoid her father, as most children did, but she never smiled at him. And she had a particularly nice smile.

Kathrine was two years old when Gilda was born — Gilda, as fair as her sister was dark. Lucia Fenwell looked upon the child and marvelled. What miracle had produced her? Does life take no account of anything but itself? Does the death of love mean nothing? Is spiritual horror but a breath upon the glass? . . . How her very soul had sickened . . . and here was Gilda, as lovely a babe as ever ecstasy had dowered — perfect, fair, smiling, with unclouded eyes.

Perhaps because she had expected to hate her, Lucia Fenwell loved this child with a deep and secret passion. Little

Kathrine soon learned that the newcomer was the centre of her mother's world. She did not resent it. To her also Gilda was a wonderful thing. No other little girl had a baby sister like a fairy in a picture book. Also, having been born with a love of beauty, she found in her heart a generous will to serve it.

Whether Gilda, as she left babyhood behind, realized the constant service and watchful protection which surrounded her, it is difficult to say. She was a strange child. Most children begin to differentiate around the age of two. But, to her mother, it seemed that Gilda had always been different. Her little smile which appeared to spring from some inward source of amusement was the same in babyhood as in childhood. Her remote eyes never changed from their first cloudless serenity. She seemed utterly selfish. Yet was she? Lucia was never sure. Most children are selfish, but not utterly. The common selfishness of childhood is a thoughtless, primitive thing. It is accepted by grown-ups with forbearance as a natural and passing phase. Lucia realized that the selfishness of Gilda was not like this. There seemed to be, in an almost startling way, reason and purpose behind it. And it was accompanied by the sweetest of tempers. People did not trouble Gilda unless they were directly in her way, and even when they were, regrettably, in that position, she walked around them if she could. Why be disagreeable when one could get what one wanted without it? Besides, half of the petulance of childhood is due to reaction from the moods of other people. And other people's moods did not react on Gilda. She did not care much about other people. To live, to enjoy, to provide her awakening senses with the stimulation which they clamoured for — these were the important things. But why be disagreeable about it? In her cool, detached manner the child was charming.

Gilbert Fenwell hated her. What queer twist in his queer nature might account for it, who can say? There may be an

antagonism of the unconscious which is outside one's reckoning, an ageless, dogging something reaching out from life to life. Lucia believed this. But the explanation may have been simpler. The man, valuing only what he did not have, may have been jealous of his wife's devotion. Or he may have hated Gilda because she did not care whether he hated her or not. When she was very little, he had been able to frighten her, but it had been an impersonal fright, an affair of nerves rather than of emotions. He may have resented this.

Whatever the reason, the result was patent. A new terror grew up in the unfinished house — a haunting thing which ate into Lucia Fenwell's heart like a slow acid and which kept little Kathrine's eyes shadowed and watching. Only Gilda was unaffected. If she wakened in the night to the sound of a loud and gusty voice, she never stole to the stairway with her heart in her throat. Nor did she lie awake trembling, fearing she knew not what. It was enough that Kathy and her mother did these foolish things. Gilda covered her ears to shut out the voice and went to sleep again.

More and more, Lucia saw that to protect one child she must sacrifice the other. There was something about the 'little black imp' which acted as a check upon her father's wildest moods. He seldom struck Kathrine. Sometimes just to see her sitting there, silent in her little wicker chair with her doll or book, prevented an outburst. Sometimes when he had reached the 'talking stage' of drunkenness, he would ramble on to the child whose dark, shaded eyes regarded him gravely. Horrible monologues these, mercifully unintelligible to the childish ears which listened . . . dreadful not to dare to snatch the child away from every sound of that crazy voice . . . but Lucia had tried that once . . . after all, Gilda was the littlest . . . it was natural to spare her.

Then one day something happened. The fear which had etched Lucia Fenwell's face saw itself justified. She had left the house to carry home a piece of finished sewing. Katharine had not returned from school, and Gilda, then just six years old, was amusing herself chasing a kitten through the uncared-for garden.

Gilbert was supposed to be occupied elsewhere, but his unexpected appearance in one of the door-windows did not disturb Gilda. She felt that she could match herself fairly well against her father in the daytime. Her slim form, her light step, and a capacity for holding herself motionless as long as it suited her were great assets. The very wraith-like qualities which infuriated her antagonist were invaluable in eluding him.

Seeing him in the door, the child would ordinarily have run away. But to-day she wanted to catch the kitten and the kitten had escaped into the house. In her excitement she did not notice that her father was 'ill' — her mother's word for a horrid condition all too familiar. Even had she noticed it, her driving impulse to do exactly as she pleased would probably have carried her on. At any rate, she made straight for the open doorway and into the arms of the drink-crazed man.

It had been one of Gilbert Fenwell's exalted days. The ego, prodded by the right amount of stimulant, had reached the stage where it seizes upon its vehicle, strong, triumphing. In the strange world of his mind, the failure, Gilbert Fenwell, had surmounted all difficulties, realized all dreams. He was going through his finished house, the finest home in Blencarrow. Before him was his well-stocked library, furnished as he had always intended to furnish it, cosy, complete. All he had to do was to sink into one of those wide chairs before the fireplace . . . they always stood there ready . . . so vivid was the hallucination that he could see the pattern of the paper on the wall . . .

But what was this? Some one in the way? . . . the doorway of dreams blocked by a scurrying figure? . . .

He drew back. The waiting chairs, the flickering fire, dissolved like wind-ripped smoke . . . only a tangled garden lay where the pleasant room had been . . . the man staggered ludicrously under the shock of his awakening . . . and in that moment Gilda laughed . . . a mocking, elfish laugh . . .

After that, Mrs. Fenwell had a weapon of sorts, and Fenwell, thoroughly frightened for the moment, had perforce yielded to her will. Gilda was to be sent away. When she had quite recovered from her strange 'accident,' she was to go to live with an unmarried cousin of the Danvers family. Cousin Elizabeth possessed a little money of her own and was eager to have a child about the house. The parting was terrible to Lucia. But there are worse things than partings.

Gilda went dry-eyed. Her farewell was pretty and affectionate to a degree. She hung about her mother and kissed dear Kathy very sweetly. What she felt about going, or about the cause of her going, none knew. Only once had Lucia found her gazing intently into the mirror, her eyes upon the jagged scar which would always mar the beauty of her forehead.

'I shall train a curl to cover it,' the child had said in a matter-of-fact tone, adding in exactly the same tone, 'I would like to kill my father, wouldn't you?'

Lucia had shivered and turned away.

Blencarrow had not guessed — at the time. Had it done so it would have been stirred to its complacent depths. But a man's house, in Blencarrow, is very much his castle. A marriage license and a closed door are presumed to shut in only the calm delights of home. Later on, there were rumours, rumours which came very near the ugly truth as Euan's careless story had shown. But no one knew anything

really. They pitied Mrs. Fenwell on general principles, but quite without any adequate idea of how pitiable she was.

And that was the one thing for which Lucia Fenwell could never be sufficiently thankful!

CHAPTER FIVE

EUAN puzzled over the peculiarities of Kathrine and the complexity of girls in general for exactly two minutes. Then his thoughts freed themselves and turned with relief to Garry. If he went down Clarges Street and Garry came up Randall Avenue, they might meet at the corner. There would not be time to go anywhere, as dinner, though much later on Sunday, was not a moveable feast. But they might arrange for a walk down by Miller's Pond after Sunday-School.

At the corner he was met by disappointment. Randall Avenue, always a quiet street, was deserted save for two figures a couple of blocks away. Neither of the two looked at all like Garry. And both appeared to be behaving very strangely. The larger figure was veering and tacking like a sailboat in a contrary wind. The smaller figure performed various movements of a flanking character. Euan felt an immediate stir of interest. A drunken man, not an unusual sight on Saturday night, was a real sensation on Sunday. It wasn't done. Yet undoubtedly this man was drunk or ill, or something. And the boy, who was, as it were, acting convoy, was now easily distinguished as Conway de Beck, otherwise 'Con-of-the-Woods.' Also it was apparent that Con was having his own time.

Euan forgot all about Garry and quickened his pace to a run, realizing as he did so that the larger figure was no other than Gilbert Fenwell -- strange how the Fenwell family seemed suddenly all over the place!

'You head him off on that side and I'll head him off on this!' called Euan to Con as soon as he could be heard. He waved his arms frantically as he had seen men do in turning back a bolting horse.

'Quit it!' warned Con ungratefully. 'Stop dancing around like that, you loon! Come along behind here and be quiet. Can't you see he's got the willies!'

'How do you know what he's got?' asked Euan belligerently.

'Maybe I don't know the willies when I see them?' suggested Con with scorn. 'Maybe I don't know how to round up a wildcat, either.'

As he spoke, he cleverly intercepted a half-formed intention on the part of Mr. Fenwell to drape himself over a water hydrant.

'If we can get him turned into Ash Street,' he confided, 'we can get home before he begins to yell.'

'Will he begin to yell?' asked Euan, edified.

Con said that Euan could bet his life he'd begin to yell. 'He's seen snakes already,' he added — 'yellar with green spots. But it's black cats he sees mostly.'

All boys are properly envious of knowledge such as this. Euan observed Con with admiration.

'They say spiders is worse,' he offered as a worthy contribution. Con nodded generously, but was too busy finessing the approaching corner to answer. Euan's curiosity took another turn.

'What are you doing it for?' he wanted to know. 'Where's old Jones? Can't he take him home?' Old Jones, otherwise Archibald J. Jones, was Blencarrow's Chief of Police. He was the entire police force also, if you except James Duffy, night watchman. 'I'll get him for you,' offered Euan helpfully.

'No, you won't,' Con's tone was truculent. 'Do you suppose she wants old Jones waltzing around and hauling him up to the Police Court?'

'Who — she?' asked Euan in surprise.

'Never you mind! You just walk along there on the other side of him, kind of quiet. Like you didn't know he was there.'

Con had no intention of explaining to Euan, who was one whole year younger than himself, that the conveying of Gilbert Fenwell home was in the nature of service to a lady. Yet such was the high truth of the matter. Two years before, Con had heard Lucia Fenwell sing at a church concert. It was his first experience of a cultivated voice and there had been magic in it. Until then the boy had dumbly wondered why human beings tried to sing. Weren't there the birds to listen to? But Lucia's remnant of a voice which had once hoped to sing in grand opera had been a revelation. Con had worshipped at long distance ever since.

But Euan could not be expected to divine this; or to understand if he had divined, for Euan had not yet reached the stage of *domnei* or *worship-your-lady*. He decided to let the introduction of the unusual pronoun 'she' pass. Con was queer. Had he not a 'de' in his name? And had not his father and grandfather been fur-traders, living for months on end in the far North Woods? It was a nice queerness, of course. Some day Con would go himself into that strange country. The love of wild places was his by right. Of all the Blencarrow boys he was the only one who knew his way about in the Big Swamp. It was rumoured that he could go from end to end of it, dryshod. It was rumoured that he knew of berry patches, far within, where a picker could fill a quart pail without moving from one spot. It was rumoured that he could tame any animal that lived. It was rumoured that he had lived alone in the Big Swamp for a week — that he had a cabin hidden there and a bit of cleared ground. It was rumoured — but to retail the rumours about Con-of-the-Woods would be to exhaust the wonderful. One thing was absolutely certain. He had a coonskin cap and he had killed the coon himself.

'You run on and stand on the edge of the sidewalk at the corner,' directed Con. 'Just stand there like you'd taken root. He'll either jump on you or sheer off and, if he sheers

off, we'll have him into Ash Street before he knows it, see?'

'Yes,' said Euan. He would have liked to inquire what would happen in the event of Gilbert's not sheering off. But Con might have thought this fussy. One has to risk being jumped on occasionally — or run the risk of being misunderstood. Euan drew himself up and tried to look as much like a lamp-post as possible. And the result was all that could be desired. The quarry was hustled gently into his own home street.

'Whew!' said Con, wiping a wet forehead. 'Now, we'll get him inside his gate and then vamoose!'

But he spoke too soon. Gilbert, abruptly and definitely, sat down. The boys looked at each other in consternation. Con was a resourceful boy, tall for his age and wiry. Euan's muscles were his chief pride. But neither of them could have moved the sodden bulk of Gilbert Fenwell, even without the will of Gilbert to the contrary. At the same time, to leave a patently intoxicated man sitting upon the sidewalks of Blencarrow on Sabbath Day was not to be thought of. Some one would be sure to tell old Jones.

'And, oh, I say, here comes Kathy!' said Euan, terribly embarrassed. 'Let's both stand on this side and p'r'aps she won't see him.'

'Why not?' asked Con, surprised. 'She's his own kid, isn't she? Guess she sees him like this about once a day.'

It was true, of course, only Euan hadn't realized it. He gave a miserable glance at the small figure coming demurely toward them. Kathy, that kid — and this! He was just twelve years old, and yesterday, or thereabouts, he would have taken such a happening quite impersonally. To-day it was different. He was aware of a confused feeling of something wrong somewhere.

Kathrine came up to them slowly. She was not flurried and her voice was interested only.

'What are you doing, Con?' she asked. She did not speak

to Euan, but her glance, he thought, seemed to defy him . . . just as if it was his fault . . . barging in?

'Trying to get your dad home,' said Con cheerfully. He also seemed quite at ease, 'And now he's gone and sat down on us.'

Kathrine surveyed her seated parent with a dispassionate eye.

'Shake him,' she directed, still addressing Con. 'Maybe he'll come if he sees me.'

Con shook him vigorously. Kathrine, her small face a mask, stood where the fuddled man could see her — if he saw anything.

'He's blinking. Shake him some more.'

Con shook him some more.

'He sees me now,' said Kathrine calmly.

Gilbert had given vent to a snorting sound. Also he made a futile clutch in the general direction of his daughter. She moved away. He stumbled up, clutching vaguely as he did so. Again the child, with dexterous gravity, eluded him. She increased the distance between them. He followed.

'That's the ticket,' said Con encouragingly. 'Keep it up, Kathy, you've got him going!'

The bizarre chase continued down the tree-lined street

. . .

Euan watched it: he had the same feeling as when forced to take sulphur and molasses. He turned away and went slowly home . . .

He was late for dinner.

A word as to his recent activities would have brought absolution. But he did not speak it. In answer to the inevitable questioning, he said briefly that he had been looking for Garry.

'You might have brought him to the house with you,' said Janet hospitably. 'T'would do the lad no harm to eat a decent meal once in a way.'

'I didn't see him,' confessed Euan.

'But you said —'

'I said I was looking for him. But it was Con I saw.' To admit Con was, plainly, the least of several evils. His mother disapproved strongly of Con and the necessity of voicing this sentiment might save further questioning. It did.

'Andrew, did you hear that?' asked Mrs. Cameron ominously.

Andrew had not heard. His blue eyes came back from far places.

'Were you speaking, Janet?'

'I was; I was telling you that Euan has been colloquing again with Conway de Beck. Will you forbid him or no?'

'Have you forbid^h him yourself, Janet?'

'I have not.'

Andrew stirred his tea. 'Was such your intention?' he asked mildly.

'Intention or not — the same is a matter for his father to decide.'

Both father and son were used to this formula. They knew that in Mrs. Cameron's orderly mind certain things were set apart for the head of the house to decide. What these things were they did not know and their ignorance lent a fillip to domestic politics. Euan drew a long breath on realizing that Con was to come under his father's jurisdiction. It would be a real tragedy to have to give up Con.

The rules of the game, however, allowed Janet to state her case as strongly as possible. She considered a moment. To say that Con was a 'wild one'; that he never wiped his feet; that he carried tame mice in his pockets; that he took Euan 'traipsing' in the swamp, and that his dog was as bad as he was, would have had no effect on Andrew Cameron. But:

'The lad's aunt is a free-thinker,' said Janet at last. Her air was that of one stating a finality.

'A Theosophist,' amended Andrew. The word, strange in Blencarrow, had an ominous sound.

'And what else is that?' demanded Janet. 'Maybe it's worse, forby.'

'What's a Theosophist?' asked Euan innocently.

It was a shrewd move. Janet could not be sure whether Euan knew what a Theosophist was or not. If he didn't know, to tell him would be to put ideas into his head. Janet deeply distrusted ideas, especially as applied to the heads of boys. Besides, she did not know herself exactly what a Theosophist was.

'Perhaps Con and Euan have not discussed religion,' suggested Andrew. 'Have you, Euan?'

The round and innocent 'No' which had leapt to Euan's lips fell back again as he felt his father's eye upon him.

'Y-es,' said Euan.

His father looked surprised.

'How would that be?' he asked.

Euan was in for it now.

'Well — it was when Mrs. Brown's baby died. One of the boys said it couldn't go to heaven because the minister didn't get there in time to christen it, and Con said that if the folks in heaven were as mean as that he'd rather go to — go to where the Browns' baby was.'

'There!' declared Janet, triumphing. 'I knew that lad could use bad language if put to it. And what did you say, Euan?'

'I said I'd go with Con,' stoutly.

Janet's knife and fork came down with a clatter.

'Well, Andrew Cameron, if after that — your own son criticizing the Almighty! As for Elizabeth Brown, the woman was warned. Dr. Springer told her —'

'Whist, Janet!' Andrew's hand went up. 'Elizabeth

Brown's child did not die without due Baptism. Under God and in the absence of Mr. McKenzie, it was my duty to baptize the infant — the which I did.'

'Land sakes! And you never to tell me a word!' said Janet. Her tone was more injured than relieved.

But Euan was conscious of comfort. He remembered that for almost an hour he had been considerably worried about the Brown baby. Having no call to quarrel with theology as such, the abstract possibility of infant damnation left him cold. But when he, as it were, knew the party — well, he was glad that the Brown baby was all right: he would tell Con.

'Anything more, Euan?'

'Only — about dogs.'

'Dogs?'

'Yes, "without are dogs and sorcerers" — you know.'

'And what did Con say about that?'

'He said he was glad it was in the Bible because it proved that there were dogs around somewhere — that they weren't just dead — and if Gruff was "without," he would mighty soon think up a way to get him in.'

Janet Cameron lifted her hands in horror. But, to Euan's relief, his father smiled.

'Gruff has a good master,' he said, 'and if Con's theology confines itself to the interpretation of Revelation, I don't think we need worry, Janet.'

'It is your responsibility,' austere. 'I'm not saying what Mr. McKenzie might think of it. As for me — I'll not have that young infidel inside my house until he learns to wipe his feet. Nor his dog either.'

The net result of this battle of orthodoxy was that Con's society became invested with a new charm, while Euan's opinion as to the relative reasonableness of his parents (always see-sawing) tipped decidedly toward the paternal side.

But this, as usual, was temporary, for, before he slept that

night, it swerved again in the opposite direction. We have already noted that Andrew Cameron was absent-minded at dinner. During the afternoon he sat as one rapt, and at the evening service it had been necessary to prod him on the rising for the psalms. Had it not been for wifely vigilance, he would have left his hat in the pew and wandered down the aisle, his hatless hands behind him. There were other symptoms, too — symptoms which on a week-day could have betokened only one thing. But on the Sabbath!

Janet hurried Euan to his bed in the back bedroom, leaving her husband, still rapt, in the seclusion of the parlour. But while she was yet in the kitchen, and just as Euan had finished saying his prayers, slow steps were heard along the hall and Andrew stood in the doorway, his blue eyes dazed as if bewildered by a too quick return to ordinary things.

‘Janet!’ Euan heard him say in a tense whisper.

‘Aye, Andrew.’

‘Janet! . . . mind you, I’m no sure . . . I’m no just certain . . . but my mind misdoubts me . . . woman, I’m terrible feart I’ve invented a plough upon the Sabbath!’

CHAPTER SIX

THE wagon loft of his father's shop, which was the scene of Euan's conversations with Con concerning the tale of the Brown baby and other debateable topics, was a place admirably suited to the needs of youth. It was both secluded and convenient and in the matter of raw furnishings lent itself to almost any game a boy might turn to. Lumber and spare parts were stored up there. The little, high-up windows were sunny and dusty. Fine sawdust lay golden on the floor and across the beams. There was a goodly smell of fresh shavings, turpentine, paint, and axle grease. The means of entrance from the floor below was narrow and dark, but what matter since the boys seldom used it? They preferred the sloping outside wagonway, a way so steep that it had to be climbed by means of the ladder-like cross-pieces which acted as stays for the wagon-wheels, the smoother part in the middle providing a perfect shoot-the-chute for times of hurried exist.

The three inseparables spent many glorious hours in this loft, and, shortly after the episode of the singing school, their number was sometimes added to in a manner which, had they stopped to think about it, would have surprised them greatly. Just how the little, dark 'Fenwell girl' came to receive the freedom of the loft, no one exactly knew. But Garry remembered his first meeting with her there very vividly.

It happened on a day when he had been particularly conscious of a need for understanding. Life, for Garry, was not quite the simple thing which Con and Euan seemed to find it. There were complications. And, as the complications were of a religious nature, they were difficult to talk about. Take the question of Peg, for example. Peg (short for Pega-

sus) was the Reverend James Dwight's parochial steed and it was Garry's duty to comb him. Now, was it, or was it not, right for Garry to transfer this duty to Con? Con liked curry-combing and Garry loathed it (a fact of which Pegasus himself seemed well aware). Still, the shirking of an unpleasant duty may be a sin. Garry did not wish to sin any more than was absolutely necessary. But it was so difficult to know what was what.

There were times when everything seemed straightforward and simple — in church, for instance. The music, the intoning, the old, old warp and woof of beautiful words, worn, like old tapestries, to softer lustre, satisfied some need of which he was becoming growingly conscious. The sight of his uncle absorbed in his priestly duties never failed to have a tranquillizing effect. Some day, if there be anything to human effort, Garry intended to be exactly like his uncle. He hoped that as he grew older his hair would recede in the same places and that his nose would adjust itself. His uncle's profile, he thought, could scarcely be bettered. It looked as if it should be stamped upon a coin. As he moved tranquilly through the service, there was practically no aspect of him which was not æsthetically satisfying. And what a difference it made! Take Canon Hodge, for example. It wasn't his fault, but his nose certainly did seem to have a secularizing effect.

Outside of church, one's behaviour became full of problems. There was Mrs. Binns. Much as he tried to emulate his uncle in a high unconsciousness of Mrs. Binns, Garry found the thing impossible. Mr. Dwight had an innocent way of looking through and beyond Mrs. Binns which both infuriated and subdued that excellent woman. But when Garry tried it, he had been compelled to take two pills at bedtime, on the ground that he was looking 'queerish about the eyes.'

Often, as Garry, after a lost battle with Mrs. Binns'

'feelings,' sewed on his own button or ate his cold supper, he was led to reflect profoundly upon the ethics of love. Was it, or was it not, necessary to love Mrs. Binns? Not real love, of course, but the 'love your neighbour' kind? If his uncle were appealed to in such matters, he refused a ruling on the ground of individual responsibility — 'You are old enough now, Garrison, to learn that personal decision is everything'; neither was it possible to discuss difficulties with Euan or Con. Euan would look blank and shuffle his feet. Con would be resourceful, but not in the right way. In the case of Mrs. Binns, for instance, he had offered the loan of a couple of tame mice to be introduced unostentatiously into that lady's bedroom. This was magnificent, but not ethics.

On the particular day referred to, Garry had gone up to the loft to think about it and, upon the same day, Kathrine Fenwell had been sent for axle grease. She had, of course, come up the stairs in orthodox fashion and Garry, with his uncle's unfailing courtesy in mind, had undertaken to transfer the terrible compound from its original container into her small tin pail.

'Old Rory downstairs ought to have done this for you,' said he indignantly. 'It's a funny shop when a customer has to get his own grease.'

Kathrine had turned suddenly red. But she saw that the boy's slip had been unintentional. How was he to know that the Fenwells were hardly on the level of 'customers' in old Rory's estimation? Neither could he be expected to guess that she had waited around for a full half-hour hoping that Andrew Cameron would come in. Andrew Cameron never seemed to remember that her father owed him anything. Old Rory never forgot it.

'Look out!' she warned Garry suddenly. 'You're getting some grease on your sleeve — oh, now you've got it on your chin! let me —' With a soft curl of shaving she removed

the smear, disdaining with a gesture his offer of a clean handkerchief. 'Grease is simply awful to wash out,' she explained. They smiled shyly into each other's eyes and Garry had an instant and pleasing conviction that he was being understood. Here, at last, was some one who might appreciate a man's struggle with his lower nature. Impetuously he spoke:

'You don't *like* coming here for grease, do you?'

'No, I don't,' said Kathrine.

'Would you' — he stammered a little — 'w-would you think it all right to let some one else come for you, if they offered to?'

Kathrine reflected.

'They wouldn't,' she decided.

'But if they did?'

'Of course I should,' in surprise. 'Why not?'

This gave the inquirer the opening he needed. 'Well, you see, if people don't do anything they don't like — I mean if they let other people — I mean it may be bad for us to let other people.' This was the best he could do. But his new hearer did not blush like Euan, nor laugh like Con.

'Yes — it might,' said the girl. Her dark, winglike brows drew together. 'But I'd take the risk,' she added with a sharp little nod.

'Oh, would you?' Here was a way out that had not occurred to Garry. One could, of course, take a risk. But:

'It would be nicer, to be sure,' he said.

Kathrine's narrow, fringed eyes opened a little more widely.

She took a long look at this boy so different from herself. Perhaps it was in that moment that her child's imagination began to concern itself with his personality. She had thought that all boys were provokingly sure of themselves and of everything else.

'I shouldn't bother,' said she. There was unconscious

strength in the small, work-worn hand which took the pail from his nervous one. Her eyes were dark and kind . . .

'Hello!' exclaimed an explosive voice. Euan, who had just arrived by the wagon chute, made no secret of his amazement at finding Garry and Kathrine in conversation.

'Hello!' answered Kathrine placidly. 'How did you get in? Did you come up that outside place? Can I go down that way? Old Rory's down in the shop.'

The desire to avoid old Rory seemed eminently reasonable to Euan. Nevertheless, her request was embarrassing.

'Well — er — you see, this way's just for boys. You'd have to slide.' His disparaging glance at the skirts which were her handicap made Kathrine's fringed eyes snap. She walked to the door and looked down. 'Oh, is that all?' she said, and without further argument she tucked her skirts about her thin legs and slid. Looking back, she smiled as victors may.

'You've forgotten your grease,' said Euan stolidly. It rather discounted the victory. Kathrine looked annoyed.

'Here! I'll sling it to you on a string,' offered Garry.

Euan watched him do it without comment.

'You've got a big smudge on your cuff,' he remarked as Garry drew in the released string. Then, with a relieved sigh, 'It's lucky Kathy's got some sense. If it had been Phemie Ellis, she'd have stayed all day.'

'Why shouldn't she have stayed?' asked Garry aggressively.

Euan's amazement expressed itself by a mouth too widely opened for the formation of words. Yet under the protection of a scornful silence he was conscious of a pleasing possibility. After all, why shouldn't she?

And after that she sometimes did.

Childhood distills itself in episodes. A scene here, a picture there, stands out from a background of unremembered days as if some lightning flash had fixed its memory forever.

The reasons for these persistencies are seldom clear, but sometimes, in looking back, a special significance emerges. Life has paused a moment leaving her footprint plain.

Often, in after life, Kathrine Fenwell was to think of that meeting in the dusty, sunny loft and to know it for a beginning. But Euan's memory stressed it not at all. For him, the day that lingered came later, slipped upon him unaware when Kathy's comradeship was already so accepted a thing that he had ceased to think about it.

It happened at the Sunday-School Harvest-Home picnic, a day so golden in its dawning that Euan pranced like a young colt with the joy of it.

Kathrine, being Presbyterian, belonged to the picnic by right, while Garry and Con had been especially invited — and Euan had a new pink shirt. No day could have been more perfect and doubtless it would have gone its way to forgetfulness as all perfection must, except for the incident of the wounded meadow-lark. Kathrine had found it with a trailing wing in a corner of the pasture fence, and at her pitying 'Oh!' the boys came running.

'It's hurt!' said Kathrine breathlessly. 'It can't fly, and there are cats at the barn. Whatever shall we do?' Her eyes, wide and darkened, questioned them.

'Give it here,' said Con, with cool mercy. 'It's probably a goner. I know a way to kill it so it won't feel a thing.'

'So do the cats!' Kathy's eyes discarded him and moved pleadingly to Garry, who had dropped on his knees beside the fluttering bird. Euan saw, without surprise, that his face was pale, and wondered that Kathy didn't see it, too. Surely she realized by this time that Garry could never be counted upon when anything was hurt? A hand that shakes from pity is still a shaking hand and, as such, of small use in an emergency. Didn't Kathy know that he, Euan, was the only one who could mend up birds properly?

'Shucks, it's nothing, Kathy,' he declared. 'I can fix it

fine with a splint.' Looking up, he anticipated her approving smile — and found that she wasn't looking at him at all. Her eyes, wide open and showing all their pansy blue, were fixed on Garry and not with surprise or disappointment or scorn, but in a long, understanding look. It was as if an invisible world had closed around them, shutting Euan out. He was conscious of an instant's sense of amazed loneliness and then Con's voice:

'It will only die, Silly. Give it here!'

'I won't!' said Euan.

'It will never fly, anyway,' said Con.

'It will,' said Euan. Dazed as he was by the swift passing of something he had not understood, he held the bird firmly. Kathrine's eyes had come back to his and in them was the expected smile. But its savour, for Euan, was gone. The day, the wonderful picnic day, had turned suddenly flat and stale.

'You'll let me help, Euan?' Kathy's voice was eager.

'No,' said Euan. 'I don't want a girl fussing about.' He pushed her aside rudely. After all she was only a girl. Strange that he should remember it now. He hadn't thought of it for ages! And there was a hot feeling in his throat. Glowering fiercely, he strode away with the wounded bird.

The three stared after him, and then Con laughed. 'Euan's got the glumps,' he said, and burst into the derisive chant,

'Scottie's mad and I am glad,
And I know what will please him —'

Any other day Euan would have fought him for that. To-day he did not even look back.

After this, of what account had been lemonade and raspberry vinegar and supper in the big barn? Or the ride home in the warm dusk with fresh hay in the wagon boxes and apples in jacket pockets, and small sweet pears? There was

singing, too. But Euan sat silent, unable even yet to shake himself free of the unwonted disturbance within him. Had any one told him that he was jealous, jealous of Garry, his hero and special friend, he would have denied the libel even to the point of battle. But something had undoubtedly happened to his golden day and the joy of it was gone. Behind the singing and the happy, creaking wagons and the goodly smell of the little brown pears, a vague dissatisfaction lay, heavy and obscure. It was like nothing Euan had ever known. It blurred the outlines of his definite, childish world like the mist-wreaths blurred the outlines of the roadside trees. Remotely it seemed to have to do with Kathy and Garry sitting together in the back of the hayrack with dangling feet, their blended voices rising clearly through the strains of 'In the Sweet By-and-By.' But Kathy and Garry often sat and sang like that. Usually Euan sat beside them. But to-night he held apart. Often in the restless dreams of his 'growing up,' that night came back to him, sweet with its smell of warm hay and perfumed mist; and always, in the dream, he sat apart, silent, feeling the stirring of the rescued bird beneath his coat. And wondering —

CHAPTER SEVEN

KATHRINE was sixteen when she put her hair up. She was in the High School then, a fourth-former expecting to take her teacher's certificate at the end of the term. And she was to sing in the Glee Club at the Literary Society's meeting on Friday night. Euan, knowing all these facts, might have foreseen something of the kind, but the actual happening found him unprepared. Indeed, so embarrassing was his expression of amazement upon noticing this evidence of her enfranchisement that Kathrine frowned and irately scribbled a note which she passed to him hastily by the usual method of under-desk mail delivery. On the note was written:

'I've grown up!'

She hadn't, of course. It was just a joke. Euan, glancing sideways to where she sat between him and the window, saw that she wasn't grown up really. The thick plait which had lain so cosily in the hollow of her neck had disappeared and where it had been was now a soft, slim whiteness. That was all. Still braided, the hair itself fitted around the small head like a dark and shining cap. Tiny dark curls escaped beside the ear and at the nape of the neck. Her face, with its new coronal, seemed smaller than ever — but how pretty her ears were! Euan hadn't known that an ear could be so pretty. He said as much to Garry when they walked home at noon. Garry said loftily that he seldom noticed ears. He, Garry, was a fifth-former now. Since education in Blencarrow was a matter of progression by never-varying steps, Garry, being one year older than Euan and Kathrine, was exactly one step higher than they. At the end of the term he would graduate, and Blencarrow, for a space, would know

him no more. Euan, who was also 'for the college,' would not graduate for another year. Con, unhappily, would not graduate at all. At some fairly early period Con had become entangled in the cultural system and had broken loose in a semi-educated state, scandalous to think of. It was even whispered that, aided and abetted by his aunt, he was educating himself by a course of 'free reading,' anything but orthodox.

The trio in High School missed Con very much, although in Garry's case the superior glories of the fifth form proved continually more absorbing. He was willing, however, to do everything possible for his eccentric friend and had more than once personally invited him to a meeting of the Literary Society. Both Euan and Garry felt that a few social affairs of that kind would have a civilizing effect hard to overestimate. It wasn't as if Con were an outsider. His fantastic method of educating himself hadn't worked out at all badly. He seemed to know quite a lot of things. And his clothes were not bad at all — if one could only induce him to wear them.

'Kathy's going to sing a solo at the Lit. on Friday night,' said Euan. 'That's why she's hoisted her hair. What do you say if we try to get hold of Con? Tell him Kathy's going to be the whole show and he's simply got to come.'

Garry agreed kindly that they might try. 'And once we get him there,' he continued, 'we might introduce him to the girls — Ellen Nichol and Peggy Seymour and Annabel Stewart and — do you suppose he would be shy if we introduced him to Constance Blake?'

Euan wasn't sure about Constance Blake. She had but lately moved to town — a rather wonderful person with a brow like alabaster and deep eyes. Also she was a swatter and was known to have no time for nonsense. Euan was frankly afraid of her, but Garry said that was simply silly. He himself had seen her home several times. She was just

like other girls, he said, only you had to meet her on her own plane. Would Con be able to do that?

'We'll give him a whack at it, anyway,' said Euan generously.

More than one of the High School literati remembered the occasion of Con's visit. It was from that night that the controversy 'Shall non-members be allowed to attend regular meetings of the Society?' dated. There was a widespread feeling, especially among the young ladies, that while, naturally, no one would wish to exclude any one from the wider opportunity for culture and self-expression provided by the Society, still — well, one never knew who might come.

Euan and Garry were delighted to sponsor Con. But they felt a little nervous. Euan had never realized how big Con was. It was found that he overflowed the Assembly Room seat in the most absurd fashion. His legs were the chief trouble. Stretched out in front of him they interfered embarrassingly with his neighbour, turned sidewise they would have blocked the aisle, drawn up they threatened to disrupt the desk. But this was a detail and did not at all account for the widespread sensation caused by Con. Everybody looked at him: even turning round to do so, which is anything but correct.

He was the handsomest person in the room. Neither of the boys had realized how terribly handsome Con was. But they could see the girls put their heads together and whisper.

During the social interval — a break thoughtfully provided in the middle of the programme — Euan and Garry found themselves in polite but insistent demand. But only for introductions.

'Though of course we all know Mr. de Beck — in a way,' said Ellen Nichol graciously.

Phemie, a very grown-up and most demure Phemic, touched Euan delicately upon the coat-sleeve.

'Do introduce him, Euan,' she whispered. 'I'm sure he won't know me, I'm changed so much, and he's almost never in town. Mother knows his aunt quite well.'

Euan performed the introduction:

'Mr. de Beck, Miss Ellis.'

'Hello, Phemie!' said Con.

('And really,' declared Miss Ellis afterwards, 'the way he said it! You'd think I was five years old!')

'I say, Euan, where's Kathy?' asked Con, growing restive; 'you said she was the whole show.'

'She's here, you'll meet her in a moment. But just let me introduce you to —'

'There she is now,' said Con with animation, and, as Kathrine was some distance away and the social interval was making considerable noise, he put a finger to his lips and whistled. A real parlour whistle, not at all loud. 'But,' as Garry said gloomily afterwards, 'it might just as well have been a steam siren.' People don't whistle in literary circles. Certainly not at the moment of being presented to Constance Blake.

('Poor Miss Blake went quite white,' said Phemie in retailing it. 'It was dreadful! — just as if she hadn't mattered! And everybody stopped talking — oh, it was ghastly!')

In that resulting moment of utter silence, Kathrine raised her hand and fluttered it at Con — a proceeding which, though slightly conspicuous, was still allowable. It meant, of course, only friendly recognition, but Con, taking it as a summons, passed unseeing through the ring of the going-to-be-introduced, and, by the simple expedient of stepping over a desk, arrived without unnecessary delay.

'Hello, Kathy,' said Con. 'Say, I wanted to tell you —'

But what he wanted to tell her was never known, for at that moment an outraged chairman rang the bell.

('Two minutes early, *at least!*' recounted Phemie. 'It was so noticeable! That poor Kathrine Fenwell! If I'd

been her I'd have sunk through the floor! And she didn't even get red. Just made room for him beside her as if nothing had happened. And wasn't a bit nervous when she sang, either. Some people have no — well, you understand what I mean.')

'You were a perfect brick, Kathy,' said Euan next day with considerable fervour. 'I think he began to enjoy himself after he sat by you. Before that, he was so restless and bumped something every time he moved. When Johnnie Carter was giving that French Canadian piece, he sighed so that several looked around. He whispered to me that French Canadians don't talk like that. He said if I liked he'd show them how French Canadians do talk, and I had a terrible time making him understand that he couldn't because he wasn't on the programme. What did you do to him, Kathy?'

'Nothing. At least I told him it would soon be over and that we could have a talk afterwards. I said he could see me home.'

'Oh!' said Euan. He wondered if this did not betray a certain vanity on Kathy's part.

'I had promised Garry,' she went on, 'but I didn't think he would mind, for once.'

'Oh!' said Euan again. 'Well — see you later.'

He walked on moodily — his round and pleasing world again assailed by a dissatisfaction which had no name. Yes, undoubtedly Kathy was getting a bit snippy.

'And likely as not putting her hair up will make her worse,' he murmured disconsolately.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KATHRINE looked after the departing Euan with a certain perplexity. They were such good chums, and yet there were times when he seemed unaccountably ready to take offence. A word usually restored the balance, if one could think of the right word. But to-day she didn't try to think of it, for behind her she had already caught the quick, light steps which meant Garry — and Garry in a hurry.

'Thought I'd never catch you,' panted the pursuing one. 'Say, what do you mean by running off with Con last night? Thought you'd promised *me*?'

'I knew you wouldn't mind,' said Kathrine placidly.

'But I did mind! Fact is, I'd something awfully special to talk about.'

'You could talk about it with Constance Blake,' said Kathrine, adding, as if by an afterthought, 'You usually do.'

'Well, of course, Miss Blake and I are quite friends,' admitted Garry modestly. 'Being in the same form — and all that. But I don't know her well enough to talk about — about things. Serious, personal things, I mean. It might bore her.'

'It might,' said Kathrine.

Garry looked pained. 'If you mean that it bores you —' he suggested delicately.

Kathrine laughed. 'I don't know what it is yet,' she said, 'but I'll risk it, if you will.'

Garry decided not to be offended. He simply had to talk to somebody and for years he had found Kathy most satisfying to talk to. He found her extraordinarily clarifying to the mind. Not because she made him think what she thought, but because she helped him to know what he thought himself. When watching a precipitation in Lab.

one day, he felt quite proud of himself for thinking: 'That is exactly what Kathy does for me — she precipitates my thought.' And somehow he had rather fancied that Kathy liked doing it.

Perhaps not, though? Certainly she was walking faster than was at all necessary.

'I say, what's the rush?' he demanded. 'Can't we loaf a bit? You see, Uncle and I had a long talk yesterday. It was a very serious talk, Kathy, about my future, you know.'

'Oh!' said Kathrine. She tried hard to be casual, but, in spite of herself, some interest as to Garry's future filtered through.

Garry pulled his cap into a less rakish angle and looked very serious. Had he been writing of himself, he would probably have said, 'The young man's brow was troubled.'

'Uncle said he thought I was old enough to have some definite ideas,' he began, 'and of course I am. As a matter of fact I had definite ideas when I was only a kid. Don't you think some people realize their destiny when very young?'

'No, I don't,' said Kathrine bluntly.

Garry looked pained once more. He took off his cap and pushed his hair back, a gesture which he had often admired in his uncle.

'Perhaps girls don't,' he admitted gently. 'But Uncle and I long ago understood that my one desire was to enter the Church.'

'Then why did you have to talk about it?' asked Kathrine. She was disappointed. Garry's desire to enter the Church was a somewhat old story. She had hoped that he had thought of something new. Something which would entail many future conferences. Garry had been so absorbed of late that their talks together had been few and unimportant. Constance Blake — but, of course, she didn't care how often he talked to Constance Blake!

'To decide a bare fact,' explained Garry, 'is one thing,

and to — to appreciate its full significance is another.' (He thought that was putting it rather well.) 'As Uncle pointed out, a dreamy boy might make a choice which a practical man might see reason to change.'

'And have you seen reason to change?' hopefully.

'No, of course not. It was the inner aspect of things which we talked of most. You see, if one is really going to be a priest —'

'But you're not going to be a priest,' in a puzzled tone. (Kathy was being very difficult.)

'Not exactly, perhaps.' Garry was patient. 'But I like the word: "priest." The Church of England uses it a great deal. We don't see why it should belong particularly to one church.'

'Only that it does.'

How provoking a thoroughly nice girl can be. Garry's tone developed a slight edge.

'In England plenty of Anglican clergymen are called priests, and some out here are, too. Why couldn't I?'

'You could,' admitted Kathrine. 'But it's silly.'

Garry colored.

'Well, but what I mean is — it isn't only the name, there's a sort of difference, too. Look at Uncle and Mr. McKenzie.'

'They belong to different churches. You're not going to be a Presbyterian, are you?'

'Well, but — look at Uncle and Canon Hodge. They're the same church, and as different as possible.'

'They are different people. And you are a different person. You aren't either your uncle or Canon Hodge. I don't suppose being a min— priest makes you any different from what you are.'

'Oh! but it should!' Garry was eager now — 'A priest is different, that's what I'm trying to tell you.'

Kathrine shook her dark head. 'Do you mean "better"?'
she asked dubiously.

No, Garry had not meant better, exactly. He hardly knew how to explain what he meant, although better was included in it.

'A priest, in any church, is a man set apart,' he ventured shyly; 'at least the kind I mean is. And I will have to be that kind if I go into the Church at all.'

Kathrine's eyebrows, which were so much like hovering wings, drew closer over her thoughtful eyes . . . after all, perhaps this problem of Garry's was a new one. Its newness came to her swiftly with the rousing of some defensive instinct. Hitherto, when they had talked of Garry's future, 'going into the Church,' had been a perfectly sane and sensible thing, like any other provision for a man's work in life. The Church had seemed to suit Garry. He was a good speaker (except on the rebuttal side of debate) and his uncle was a minister. For the rest — well, the rest was taken for granted.

'You see,' began Garry again, 'a pr— minister gives his whole life to a special work.'

'So does a lawyer, or a doctor,' said Kathrine.

'But a priest's work has to come first always, before everything. Like my uncle.'

Kathrine considered this. The defensive instinct was fully awake now.

'What else has your uncle?' she asked. 'If he has nothing but the Church, then there's nothing to put it before.'

'There may have been, once.'

This was indisputable. Kathrine, not knowing the history of Mr. Dwight, had to admit it.

'No doubt he might have had all kinds of things,' went on Garry. 'But he gave them up. He gave up a home —'

'He has Mrs. Binns to keep house for him.'

'You can't call Mrs. Binns a home.'

'Not a nice one,' admitted Kathrine, 'but . . .'

'What I mean is,' interrupted Garry, with a gulp, 'he

didn't get married. And hasn't any sons to — to come after him.'

'He has you.'

'Adopted sons don't count.'

'No,' said Kathrine. 'I don't suppose they do. But I should think they would take up just as much time. I mean, as far as his work goes, your uncle might just as well have had a real one — if he could have liked it better.'

'That's not the way to look at it at all,' said Garry. 'It's not actual time, or anything like that. It's the attitude of mind, the cutting-off of ties, the sacrifice — don't you see?'

'No, I don't,' said Kathrine.

Her companion looked at her in pained surprise. She sounded almost sullen. And her mobile face was stormy, her lips hard.

'I can't see it at all!' she burst out with sudden bitterness. 'Goodness knows I've often wondered why any one ever wants to get married. But, of course, if any one does want to risk it, why not a minister? At least, he might treat his family decently and show other people how to treat theirs. It seems silly to argue that a man can help other people's sons better because he has none of his own.'

'But, Kathy, don't you understand —' Garry paused abruptly, struck with a swift realization that she didn't and couldn't. For once, she had not followed him. The question raised was to her still a purely practical one. Its mystical side belonged to a world into which she had not yet entered. Love to her meant affection, service, the dear and common food of life; to some more, to others less, to God, theoretically, most (especially in the case of ministers). But of love as a lifetime's passion, a fire in which all service fused, her unawakened heart had no conception.

The boy felt strangely abashed. Wordless, too. There were no words in which he could clothe the thing that was trembling into being. He could not make plain the inner

stirring to one whose pool of life was yet untroubled. Even had he words, he might talk forever without making such a one understand the tingling delight and fear and dreadful yet beautiful unrest which lay beneath its protection of schoolboy arrogance — and of which this choice of his would be a final dedication. The words 'marriage,' 'home,' 'children' meant still to the girl what they had meant to her as a child, but to the boy they were already shaping themselves into mighty arbiters of destiny.

'What did you tell your uncle?' asked Kathrine, vaguely puzzled at his pause and silence.

'I told him I would let him know soon. It will make a difference in more ways than one. Even in my choice of college. I wanted to think. But I don't believe thinking will change me. I have a queer feeling about it — as if it were something fixed that I can't change.'

'Oh, Garry,' reproachfully. 'You know we decided months ago that things can't be fixed or there wouldn't be free will, and you know we decided that there was free will.'

Garry nodded. He was modestly willing to acknowledge their ability to decide the mainsprings of human life offhand.

'I know I am free to decide,' said he, 'but I seem to feel that — well, it feels as if I had decided, long ago and without knowing it.'

Kathrine frowned. This did not sound quite as much like free will as it might.

'You'll have noticed,' he proceeded, 'that I am very like my uncle. It is natural that I should make the same decision. And when I said what I did about his having given up everything, I didn't mean that he had given up happiness. He is happier than any one I know. He doesn't worry, like I do, about right and wrong. He just knows. It must be ever so much easier when you know. When I am really in the Church, I shall feel like that.'

This last sentence was said as if challenging contradiction, but, as no one contradicted it, Garry went on.

'You remember how we decided that the thing that matters is the centre thing? The thing you wind yourself around? It's because my uncle is wound round the Church that he doesn't mind Mrs. Binns, or cold coffee, or what the Bishop doesn't quite like. But it must have taken him some time to get that way. He couldn't have been like that always.'

'Yes, he could!' Kathrine's words came in a little rush. 'I'm sure that when your uncle was a tiny baby he was just like he is now!'

This remark was so unexpected that for a full moment Garry did not realize its extreme absurdity; when he did, he laughed.

'Now it's you who are being silly,' he said loftily.

Kathrine shook a stubborn head and went from bad to worse.

'And I really don't think you are a bit like your uncle, Garry — not a bit!'

This was not to be tolerated.

'Then you are a very unobservant young woman,' said Garry. As he said it, the gulf between the fifth and fourth forms seemed to widen immeasurably. On one side stood Garry with Constance Blake and other choice spirits, on the other was Kathrine, mutinous, saying the most absurd things!

Garry touched his cap and walked away. Yet he found that, without any apparent will to resist, Kathrine had as usual precipitated his thought. He was quite sure now that he was never going to marry.

Passing the door of Cameron's wagon shop, he saw Euan apparently helping his father to fit a wagon wheel. 'Good old Euan,' thought Garry with a touch of kindly patronage — 'one of the best —! But not likely to be called upon to decide serious problems yet awhile.'

Oddly enough that was exactly what Euan was doing at that moment. Besides fitting the wheel, he and his father were discussing the future. It may have been mere coincidence or it may have been that Garry and Euan had been temporarily tuned in with a thought-wave having to do with futures. Futures may have been 'in the air,' though the conception of 'the air' as a great grab-bag, into which one might dip at will, would have seemed very strange in that but lately vanished yesterday. Even now we do not know what the grab-bag may contain besides jazz bands and sermons. Sound-waves, light-waves — why not thought-waves too? But if so, whose thoughts? — and from whence?

It was characteristic of Andrew Cameron that, while it was his firm intention to give Euan a college education, he did not take it for granted that one of the learned professions would naturally follow. Knowledge, to Andrew, was a thing in itself; something to be sought for and valued, an ingredient in the making of a man, but not necessarily of a professional man. He would have thought it quite satisfactory if Euan, upon 'leaving the books' should decide to come home and make wagons. But he determined not to be narrow-minded about it. Hitherto he had not discerned in Euan any yearning toward wagon-making. Nevertheless, it was only fair to state the advantages of the business.

'It is a good business, Euan.' (Andrew's Gaelic accent was sometimes quite noticeable and what he really said was, 'It iss a good pisness!') 'It has responsibility. Every wagon must be a good wagon and only the master can see properly to that. Leaving things to others means a bolt loose somewhere. And that is well. Without responsibility a man rusts. Besides that — there is a use in wagons. It is not good to labour at unneeded things. . . . There is leisure, too. . . . much of wagon-making can be done and well done with the mind on other matters — I'll not be meaning such matters as — as inventions,' he added hastily, conscious of his own

weakness, 'but matters of reflection which all men stand in need of. Thought lives on thought, remember that. To be too busy to think is an ill way to be and the wealth it brings is poverty forby.'

Euan sat and nursed his knee. It must not be taken that these remarks of Andrew's had been made in sequence or that they partook of the nature of a speech. They were observations delivered at intervals between which old Rory was directed, customers attended to, and the business of wagon-making generally expedited.

'Howsomever,' said Andrew, as if by an afterthought, 'it is maybe not wagon-making that you have in mind, Euan?'

'No,' said Euan promptly, 'I want to be a doctor.'

A moment before making this statement Euan had not known what he wanted to be. But having made it, he found it to be true. He did want to be a doctor. Only he hadn't thought about it.

His father deftly fitted two boards together and tested the angle with a square.

'Doctors are necessary,' said Euan virtuously. Andrew's eye seemed a trifle absent, but he murmured: 'Aye.'

'And a doctor is very responsible. He can't leave anything to anybody else,' Euan proceeded. 'As for thinking, a doctor is thinking all the time. Even when he is as busy as can be, he has to think; thinking is his work.'

'Aye, I can see that it might get to be work if he kept at it all the time,' said Andrew sympathetically, 'but maybe he would take a day off, whiles. And when did you decide to be a doctor, Euan?'

'Oh, I —' Euan was naturally going to say that he had always intended to be a doctor. But his father's blue eyes were on him — 'Just now,' he ended sulkily.

Andrew nodded. 'As good a time as another. And you think you'll not be changing your mind?'

Euan was quite sure he would not be changing his mind.

'Your mother will be fine and glad,' said Andrew.

'Why?' in surprise.

Andrew's eyes twinkled. 'It would take a wiser man than me to tell why women-folk like doctors — but they do, Euan. You'll find that.'

He did find it, at least as far as Janet was concerned. She was greatly pleased and immediately began to ask questions. When had he first thought of being a doctor? Why had he thought of it? What kind of doctor was he going to be? Why had he not spoken of doctoring before? etc.

Euan, very shy, had appeared merely sulky. To all questions he replied jerkily that he didn't know.

'You'll need to get over not knowing if you're going to be a doctor, my lad,' said Janet. 'And in the meantime I'll trouble you to answer respectfully when you're spoken to.'

Kathrine, too, received the news favourably. And she didn't expect him to tell her what he didn't know himself. On the contrary, she told him something. For, after they had comfortably established Euan with a large practice as consulting specialist, she suddenly said:

'Euan, do you remember the bird at the harvest-time picnic?'

Euan, surprised, remembered it very well.

'Did it get better?'

'Of course it did.'

Kathrine looked thoughtful. 'Maybe that was when,' she said.

'When what?'

'When you decided to be a doctor, Silly.'

CHAPTER NINE

IN June of that year, Garry headed the list of senior matriculants, and departed for his chosen college. It was expected that he would do Blencarrow great credit. True, it was whispered in some quarters that he had High Church leanings; and a certain withdrawn air, combined with a scholarly palor, led more than one of MacIvor's Step to forebode an early desertion to the Church of Rome. But this was not seriously credited and served only to enhance the young man's attractions. His finely shaped head, small features, and air of fragility were very suited to one who (very likely) is preparing to forswear the world.

Euan had still one year of High. But Kathrine, with no university in prospect, had finished save for the months of Model School, needed to confirm her teacher's certificate. No one, save herself and her mother, knew what miracles of sacrifice and planning had made those High School years possible, and now the girl was anxious to be definitely at work. To the lure of higher education she perforce turned a deaf ear. Andrew Cameron's suggestion that university was quite possible if a sensible lass could bring herself to accept 'a bit lift' which would be 'a great pleasure to a friend, forby,' was met with refusal, wistful enough, but firm.

'Even if I felt it right to take the money, Mr. Cameron,' she said, 'I couldn't leave Mother. You will understand that.'

The wagon-maker, who understood too well for the comfort of his kindly heart, nodded.

'You'll be knowing best, no doubt,' he admitted, 'though it is a peety — and Euan will be terribly fashed to miss your company.'

'Fashed,' Euan undoubtedly was. The glamour surrounding prospective 'university' became appreciably thinner.

'It is a burning shame,' he declared — 'a girl like that! Besides, with Con up North and Garry at college, whatever will she do in this hole of a place with me not here?'

'Maybe the lass will make shift with the few inhabitants left,' suggested Andrew mildly.

But Euan, impervious to sarcasm, flung away. He was quite convinced that his whole concern was for Kathrine. He hated to think of her being lonely.

'I do wish you had more friends, Kathy,' he said, gloomily, one day. It was, as usual, the wrong thing to say. The friendless one looked at him coldly.

'I mean,' he blundered on, 'there are so many who would like to be friends, only you won't.'

'It's very kind of them,' said Kathrine. 'But — I'm busy, you see.'

'It'll be horrid for you when I go down to university next September.'

'Dreadful,' agreed Kathrine demurely.

'But,' cheerfully, 'you may not be here either, if you are going to teach.'

'I may get a room here.'

'There are no vacancies.'

'Miss Walker is going to be married.'

'Miss Walker!'

'It's a secret. She told me because — well, because she is one of those friends you said I didn't have.' Kathrine smiled a little. 'I didn't know I had her myself. She's so shy and quiet. But she's a dear, Euan! She is going to marry Caldicott's new bookkeeper, Mr. Gilfillan.'

'That old man!'

'He's only forty.'

'Well — But then, she's not exactly young either, is she? The School Board will have a fit! It's the first vacancy

they've had since Miss Macdonald died. Won't the old boys feel important?'

'Do you think I may be likely to get it, Euan?'

'Certain, why on earth not?' . . . Another blunder . . . of course he knew very well why she might not.

'You see,' went on Kathrine, 'I *can't* go away. There is Mother. And very soon there may be Gilda. Cousin Elizabeth, where Gilda is, may go back to England any time. Her brother there has wanted her for years. And she couldn't take Gilda. Oh! Euan, I must get some work before Gilda comes!'

'But — won't she work, too?'

Without answering, Kathrine took a *carte-de-visite* photograph from her handbag and passed it to him.

'Whew!' said Euan.

Kathrine nodded.

'She's every bit as pretty as that,' she declared, 'and she hasn't had very much work to do at Cousin Elizabeth's. We can't expect her to change all at once. If you saw her you'd understand. She's not like me.'

'Not a bit,' said Euan with conviction. . . . 'You're much nicer,' he added shyly.

Kathrine laughed. 'Very neat — but not quite neat enough. You should have said, "You're much prettier."''

'But —'

'Oh, don't spoil it. Of course, I'm not. That's why you should have said it — silly.'

She had left him laughing. An encounter with Euan usually cheered her up. How innocently sure he had been about her missing him. . . . Well, it was true enough. She would miss him . . . not as she missed Garry . . . though of course she didn't really miss Garry at all . . . it was only that Blencarrow had seemed to shrink lately . . . narrower and narrower . . . was Euan right in saying it was her own fault that she had few friends? . . .

There were many very nice people in Blencarrow who were willing to overlook her father. The pleasant homes of her grandfather's old friends were open to her. If she seldom entered them, it seemed absurd to say that she was too proud to do so . . . that was what Euan had meant . . . and yet always, even as a child, she had drawn back, shivering at the kindness which she felt was pity thinly hidden . . . a want of generosity in herself, she supposed . . .

Her mind travelled back to the one girl friend she had whole-heartedly accepted. This had been Amy Graham, the daughter of John Graham, M.P., for the riding of which Blencarrow was the centre. Colonel Fenwell and old Mr. Graham had been friends. The son had tried to be a friend to Gilbert and had lost hope only when hope was gone. Mrs. Graham had been Lucia's friend, too — she was a kind, if futile, woman, always vaguely wondering why everybody wasn't pleasant to everybody else. She had been very pleasant always to Lucia's children. Kathrine and Gilda had played with Amy as often in their own unkept garden as in Amy's carefully tended one. When Gilda had gone away, Amy had clung still closer to Kathrine. Then John Graham had died and Mrs. Graham had gone abroad in quest of health. Amy had been sent to school. For four years she and Kathrine had not seen each other and then Mrs. Graham, deciding to spend the summer in Blencarrow, had brought Amy home.

Amy, you must understand, was a very nice girl. But she had passed four years at a high-grade school where she had been taught not to be snobbish. The head mistress had made quite a point of this. 'I teach my young pupils not to be snobbish,' she said, 'I make a point of it. In a young country like this it may be necessary to meet any one.'

Gentle Mrs. Graham thought this rather nice. Miss Spence was a lady who apparently had very proper views. She could leave dear Amy with her without fearing that she

would be taught to be unpleasant to any one. The result was that Amy, a teachable young person, came home with a large and cultivated tolerance which was utterly intolerable.

'Dear Kathy,' thought Amy, 'I must be very nice to her!' And she was.

Naturally that ended it . . . Kathrine could think of it with a smile, but at the time it had hurt . . . It had hurt very much.

After this Kathrine became still more careful. She was not unfriendly or morose or too noticeably reserved. She was just — careful. The High School girls liked her. They asked her to their homes for the real pleasure of having her. Kathrine would have gone gladly had she possessed a home to which she could have asked them back. As it was, there had to be limits.

It wasn't pride . . . She assured herself it wasn't pride . . . who could connect pride with the fallen Fenwells?

But the real struggle with this something which was not pride came when, during the next autumn, Miss Walker slyly made her secret known and Kathrine, due to finish her short course in Model School in time to fill the vacancy, must cease to hide the necessities of her case. Her grandfather's friends would be kind, but there were others —

She wondered afterward if it was by accident that she met Elder Cameron in Mayor Tiddy's office. It was a fortunate chance, anyway, for though he said nothing at all, his presence was a support, and the interview went through with surprising smoothness. In the street afterward she found him waiting for her and, though his face was grave, she thought there was a twinkle somewhere.

'I was waiting,' said Andrew, 'to say how pleased I am that you'll be thinking of taking Miss Walker's place in the school.'

'Thinking of it?' repeated Kathrine, flushing. 'I am *asking* for it, Mr. Cameron.'

Andrew looked faintly surprised. 'But maybe that would not be necessary, whatever,' said he, 'seeing that the Board will be offering it at the next meeting.'

'Offering it? To me?'

Andrew's surprise deepened. 'To whom else?'

There was a pause. While it lasted, Andrew was careful to look at nothing nearer than the horizon. And then he felt a girl's warm hand slip into his.

It was Kathrine's first triumph — this offering by the School Board of Miss Walker's room. How it was managed Blencarrow never exactly knew. For there were many who declared the appointment of Gilbert Fenwell's daughter to be a scandal to the town. Were not School Boards and all public bodies prayed for regularly every Sabbath and was it not their special duty to see that the sins of the fathers were duly visited? In the case of the parental Sin being alive and walking the streets was not this duty doubly clear? But Mayor Tiddy, entrenched behind his agricultural implements, was unmoved.

'The girl's qualified, ain't she?' said Mr. Tiddy. 'Then what the hell has her father got to do with it!' — in a poorer man such sentiments would have savoured of anarchy.

Kathrine, carrying the sweetness of victory home, felt the sap of youth flow strongly in her veins. Her distrust of life ebbed. Her caution weakened. Perhaps the world was kinder than she had thought. She remembered what Euan had said about friends. Perhaps he was right and she had been ungenerous. She began to plan, to hope —

'Do you think we might ask Miss Walker and Amy Graham, and two or three from the Model Class for supper, Mother?'

Lucia looked frightened, but pleased.

'Why, yes, I think so,' she said. 'If we — if we choose our time.'

The time was chosen very carefully. Gilbert Fenwell had

undertaken a job of carting which would keep him overnight at a near-by village. It was almost as if fate were assisting, the arrangement came so pat . . . after all, if one had a little courage . . .

No prettier supper table was laid in Blencarrow on that chosen night. Lucia had not forgotten her traditions and there were other and more tangible left-overs from former glories. The linen, for instance, had been a wedding gift — not every one in Blencarrow had linen like that. The silver, though a remnant, was enough to serve, the cut-glass also. Besides, there are refinements in the laying of a table which come naturally or not at all.

It really seemed as if a bogey had been laid. Kathrine, flushing at her own eager reflection in the oval mirror over the mantelpiece, wondered why she had been slave to it so long. The dread of her father, which was not fear so much as a chill acceptance of every possible horror, seemed all at once excessive and unreal. Why had she not shaken free of it before? Why had she allowed her mother —

‘Kathrine?’

Lucia was standing in the doorway, faintly flushed. The grey silk gown, which had been freshened so cleverly, billowed gracefully from her slender waist. Where the V-shaped neck fell open, the skin showed white and fair still. How lovely she must have been — once! Kathrine’s heart contracted with a familiar pang, and fear, half-exorcised, stole back. How should one not fear the crouching thing which had trampled such loveliness under its mud-stained feet? Across the moment’s illusion of security its shadow fell with grim and waiting mockery. ‘Deliver us from evil!’ The prayer leapt unbidden to the girl’s mind. But who could deliver Lucia now?

‘Will I do, Kathrine?’

‘You are charming, dear!’

Lucia came farther into the room.

'I think it is rather nice.' She smoothed the grey gown shyly. 'And how pretty the table looks in the firelight! I am glad it turned cold so that we could light the grate . . . If Gilda were only here' . . . It was, as Kathrine knew, a never-lessening longing, and the pity of it stung her from her relapse into bondage.

'Mother,' she said, resolutely, 'why shouldn't Gilda be here? Aren't we making a mistake? Why do we keep on being so afraid? Neither Gilda nor I are children now. If father —'

'Don't!' The word was almost a cry, and Kathrine, remorseful, saw that the pretty pink had faded from Lucia's cheeks. She looked, as the girl so hated to see her, strained and old. And it was with a palpable effort that she added, 'Do not let us talk of your father to-night. He is not here.' Her eyes wandered about the firelit room. 'He is not here.' She repeated it a little vaguely.

Kathrine made another effort. 'Even if he were here —' she began. But again the look on her mother's face stopped her. 'Oh, well, let's not think of it!' she finished; 'perhaps it's our continual thinking of things that helps to make them happen.'

Lucia only twisted her hands in silence.

Miss Walker, so soon to be Mrs. Gilfillan, was the first of the invited to arrive. With her the saving grace of the Usual came back into the room. Lucia remembered again how pretty the table looked and Kathrine forgot everything save the novel pleasure of playing hostess. Her repressed social instincts glowed with the satisfaction of asking her guests to lay aside their wraps in a room of which no girl in Blencarrow need have been ashamed. Given correct proportion, a few bits of fine old furniture and natural good taste, surprising results may be obtained with little. Kathrine had worked hard that day and Lucia had contributed unsuspected aids in the shape of candle-shades and a bedspread of

real distinction. The guests took all these niceties as a matter of course (and how satisfying that was!). They noticed everything, yet nothing obtruded — surely, the last comment upon harmony, and the sore spot in Kathrine's proud young heart was magically soothed.

How they laughed and talked over that supper! How they drank shy Miss Walker's health in thin delightful glasses and raspberry vinegar. How good the pineapple whip was! How fragrant the coffee, how crisp the little cakes! It was going to be a success . . . it was a success . . .

And then, as the discerning will have anticipated, Gilbert Fenwell came home.

Kathrine thought afterward that she ought to have expected it. Had her painfully built-up caution not been lulled by an unusually long period of sodden lethargy on Gilbert's part, even the stimulus of falling heir to Miss Walker's position would not have blinded her to this evident possibility. She had long ago known that her father exercised, when so minded, an uncanny cleverness in divining any unusual action of hers or Lucia's. Even when he had appeared to hear and see nothing, they would find such action diabolically forestalled. The unexpectedness of his knowledge and the horrid efficiency of his methods of using it had been part of their dread of him. Often Kathrine had set her lips and sworn that never again would any act of hers give him the chance of exercising this devilish ingenuity, yet once more the determined optimism of youth had betrayed her!

Gilbert was not drunk. Kathrine had noticed this at once. He always lurched when he was drunk. To-night he walked firmly, even lightly. And he was smiling — or whatever one would like to call his particular distortion of facial muscles. Kathrine knew what that meant — not drink, but drugs. And she knew what drugs meant, too.

She looked desperately around the table — oh, to get the

girls out of the room before — but it was already too late.

‘A party?’ Gilbert’s voice, suavely astonished, fell into the startled silence. ‘How very pleasant!’

Under the stimulus of the drug, he could carry himself steadily, standing straight and insolent as he had been used to stand when women still drank toasts to Handsome Fenwell. But he was quite crazy — Kathrine knew that — fortunate that there was only blunted silver on the table . . .

‘Mrs. and Miss Fenwell at home!’ he continued in his soft, insinuating voice. ‘But no host — oh, so unfortunately, no host!’ His eyes swept the table and he sniggered. ‘No host,’ he repeated, sadly, ‘no host . . . until now!’

He walked lightly to the table, as if to repair some unpardonable omission, lifted the delicate glass decanter and hurled it deliberately at his wife’s face . . .

It struck her shoulder only, for Lucia, from long habit, had moved quickly. The raspberry vinegar, blood in the candlelight, spread redly over the grey gown.

‘Permit me,’ said Gilbert, turning, ‘the guest of honor, I think!’ — and, taking the frightened Miss Walker in one hand and her goblet in the other he began delicately to drip its ruby contents upon her hair. ‘Dearly belovéd —’ he began . . .

It lasted only a moment. The paralysis passed. Chairs were pushed back. Miss Walker found herself, shivering, in Kathrine’s strong grasp. Gilbert, wildly laughing now, shivered the goblet upon the floor. The appalled supper guests waited for no more. Somehow they found themselves back in the candle-lighted bedroom. Kathrine helped them into their wraps . . . Ellen Nichol was sobbing helplessly . . . Annabel Stewart couldn’t find her hat — nor put it on properly when she did find it. One of the other girls kept saying, ‘Oh! Oh!’ under her breath . . . they were not used to seeing Evil face to face . . . only Kathrine was steady.

Miss Walker, shaking like a leaf, put an arm around the girl's waist.

'My dear,' she faltered, 'don't — don't look like that! We understand.'

It was all she could think of and she had had the sense to know that brevity was best. She made Ellen stop sobbing and adjusted Annabel's hat.

Kathrine said nothing at all. When they were all ready, she held the light as they hurried down the stairs. At the door Amy Graham lifted a blanched face and with a bravery worthy of her Superior School held out a trembling hand.

'We've had a l-lovely time, Kathrine,' she stammered. But the rest were too shaken for politeness. Wordless they moved off into the cold clear night.

With them went the social life of Kathrine Fenwell.

CHAPTER TEN

BUT if Kathrine's world in Blencarrow became increasingly narrow, not so the worlds into which her three friends had hurled themselves. These worlds were very full and had far horizons. The old skyline of Blencarrow began to fade. Kathrine, silhouetted against it, seemed to fade, too. If this were merely an error of vision, they could hardly be expected to know it.

Euan had had a whole year more of Kathrine than either Garry or Con, but the longer companionship had brought no added nearness. Their friendship, deftly directed by Kathrine, tended to assume a taken-for-granted quality. True, he had noticed, with a certain soreness of heart, that Kathrine's regret at his leaving town was not so noticeable as he had hoped. But Kathrine's regrets, he told himself, were never noticeable. She probably felt far more than she showed. Besides, he didn't want her to feel badly, did he? Certainly not.

For himself he was frightfully, wonderfully full of affairs. The new life left him very little time to think of Kathy. He began to dream of her instead. Never having bothered with the psychology of dreams, this did not enlighten him. He saw nothing ominous in the fact that Kathy, crowded out during the day, stole back at night. Yet there she was always, the lady of brave adventures through which he, Euan, moved, the very pattern and pink of chivalry. Thus mollified, his ego brought from these dreams a sense of hope and well-being which it complacently interpreted in exactly the wrong way. Euan thought that he was getting along without Kathy very nicely.

He had quite grown out of his nervous avoidance of girls. There were so many of them. And they were all so much

alike — except Kathy. There was a girl in his medical classes. Quite a nice kind of girl, a real brick. Her name was Cynthia Wakefield, and, without being exactly pretty, she had a face which a sensible man would look at twice. Euan admired her nose particularly and he liked the way she carried her head. He disapproved, however, of her short hair. It was, he felt, an unnecessary gesture of independence! Wasn't it enough that she was a pioneer, one of the first valiant young women to enter in at the recently opened medical gate? Why emphasize her (questionable?) emancipation by flinging her hair in the face of Providence?

It was rather stimulating, though, to see her do it. And to know that she lived alone, in rooms, with a girl friend who made a precarious livelihood by doing designs and illustrations. The girl friend was astonishingly pretty, but looked, according to Euan, 'like a foreigner.' She had black eyes and lips so red that they produced a small shock. Euan had visited them once and found the experience enlightening. It hadn't seemed strange or awkward at all, but only jolly and comfortable. And Madeline, of the black eyes, had made wonderful maple syrup toffee.

As the shuttle car at the far end of which the girls lived did not shuttle after twelve, Euan had to walk home. He thought of Cynthia all the way. Of her problems, of her annoying self-sufficiency, and of her attractive nose — and decided that he, at least, did not object to women wanting to be doctors. Why shouldn't they have a shy at that as well as anything else? — that is, until they got married and had homes of their own. This broad-mindedness pleased him. He felt that he was coming on, was in fact quite a man of the world already. Blencarrow seemed to drop behind him. There was nothing there for a progressive man. No wonder Con had always been so eager to get away. He pitied Con, though. Life in the Northern woods must lack many of the delightful sophistications which he, Euan, was ex-

perienicing. Garry, too, he especially pitied — hard luck to be immured in an Anglican College, shut out from all that wider world into which he, though a whole year younger, was so confidently entering. He went to sleep pitying Garry.

Yet in his sleep the person he pitied was unaccountably changed. He dreamed of sitting alone on the warm hay of a hayrack, of the stir of a wounded bird beneath his coat, and of a strange blurring mist which rose and strangled him while Garry and Kathy sang 'In the Sweet By-and-By.'

Meanwhile, Garry, unconscious of Euan's solicitude, was having a very good time, indeed. He didn't know that he was missing anything at all. For Garry had 'fitted in.' After the variable outer air of Blencarrow, the more settled atmosphere of his chosen college had closed around him like a protecting shell. Discussion was daily food here, but not dispute. Garry felt safe in letting many of his old hesitancies drop away. His mind seemed freer and yet less exposed to the perils of freedom. And, most satisfying of all, he had found in Adam Harmon, a young professor of severe and delicate mind, a friend ideally suited to his need.

With Adam Harmon, Garry found that he could talk freely, sure of ready understanding and response. Encouragement, too, for Harmon's views on the celibacy of the clergy were emphatic. What Mr. Dwight held as a matter for individual choice, Adam Harmon advocated on much less tolerant grounds. He was a man in the early thirties, a strange mixture of ice and fire and with a background of worldly experience which his pupil lacked. Garry worshipped happily at the new shrine.

So content was he that he began to wonder if he were missing something. What had happened to all the 'hardness' which he had made up his mind to endure? After Mrs. Binns, college fare was luxury. Study imposed no hardship on one who loved it. The outside world, represented by a gentle eddy of social life against the college walls, offered few

distractions. Of temptation, frankly named as such, there was none! But then, Garry conceived himself to be particularly unsusceptible where women were concerned.

'There was a time,' he said naively to Adam Harmon, 'when I thought that I might have to make a real sacrifice. But perhaps that isn't always so? Perhaps, with some, the decision is so largely a thing of mind and spirit that the physical aspects remain secondary?'

His adviser admitted that this might be so . . . in some cases.

'But,' went on Garry, 'if I have missed that particular struggle —'

'You haven't,' said Harmon unexpectedly; 'you haven't quite got there yet, that's all.' His glowing eyes rested on the younger face with some pity. 'Look here,' he went on, 'you don't quite understand what you're talking about, you know. But you will. And don't be too eager for the understanding. You'll have your struggle, all right. What I want to say is, don't weaken when it comes. Fight through. It is only on the other side that you'll be safe. Make no mistake about that.'

Garry, disturbed, would have liked to argue, but Harmon would say no more. 'Keep your mind clear as long as it is clear,' he advised. 'Fill it with the spiritual things you love. Hold fast through everything to the decision you have made. Nothing can conquer you — except yourself.'

'Oh, I think I've got myself well in hand,' said Garry cheerfully. Harmon's warning flattered rather than alarmed him. In his heart he had been conscious of a vague disappointment at being neglected by the Devil. But Father Harmon (he liked to call him 'Father' to himself) had seemed to think that this would be remedied. The thing to do was to store up spiritual experience as one stores up ammunition against an unknown foe who may one day declare war.

He turned to his books and his thoughts. He worked hard,

overworked, and then one night chilled suddenly in a too cold room. Result — pneumonia and banishment to Blencarrow for the duration of the cure.

The news of his friend's breakdown came to Euan by way of a letter from his mother. He got most of his Blencarrow news that way. For Kathrine, he found, was, in spite of the books he sent her, an infrequent letter-writer.

Janet wrote every week. The letters were serious affairs, done in the best tradition, unvarying in form and sequence, but highly variegated as to incident. First came such inquiries as the season rendered suitable regarding socks and underwear and Euan's wardrobe generally. Followed a few directions regarding diet and a hope that Euan was not staying up late at night. Balancing this was an assurance of a satisfactory state of affairs at home, comprised in the sentence, 'Your father and myself are in our usual health, thank God.' News, if any, of Andrew's latest invention was added here: and the approach of still another of these events was heralded by some such observations as the following:

'I may add, Euan, that your father has seemed a bit abune himself of late. I fear that Mistress Nichol, who took supper with us last evening, found your father's manner strange. For the why that when she asked him what was the most outstanding quality for one who intended to become a minister of the Gospel, he said, "a half inch more play and a drop of oil in the cylinder." Your father was much put to it to explain his bad manners. Nor did she understand when he had explained, being a woman of small discernment.' (Janet was very proud of her English.)

And then, duty being fully done, the letter-writer plunged whole-heartedly into the common affairs of Blencarrow. Caution and decorum were nicely observed, but there were no halftones lost on that account. Rather did the weight of Janet's style lend substance to trifles light as

air. For instance, 'It was said in the Ladies' Aid meeting by Mistress MacAllister that Mary Jamieson (MacAllister that was, only you won't remember her) will be home for a short visit, the which is made necessary by a trouble of the nerves. A very sad thing. But it may be (I'm no saying) that the nerve trouble is known by the name of Archie Jamieson, in which case the visit is like to be a long one. Poor Mary!'

Euan was never too busy to pick his steps through these pages of small-town happenings. His was a naturally observant nature and already he was beginning to suspect that life anywhere is life in a small town. Besides, there was always the possibility that his mother might mention the Fenwells. He dared not even skip the church news, for there might be a line, 'Mrs. Fenwell and Kathrine were in their seats at morning service — the first time in four Sabbaths,' or, 'The evening service was well attended, Mr. McKenzie speaking upon the Exodus. Kathrine Fenwell came in late. I may say, Euan, that there are not wanting those who criticize Kathrine for not being more constant in church attendance. Now that she is a teacher of youth, it is felt that a good example may be expected. But your father will have it that Kathrine may have other duties. For myself I can believe that a time might come when Gilbert Fenwell would cease to be a duty. Your father's views are otherwise.'

The letter which brought Euan news of Garry's illness was an especially long one.

'You'd have been vexed indeed to see him, Euan,' wrote Janet, 'and especially when he first came home. What with that Rectory house as cold as Iceland and that Mrs. Binns boiling all the good out of the beef-tea, it was felt by the neighbours, Episcopalian or not, that something must be done. Mrs. Ellis, who, as I told you in my last but one, has moved into the same street, undertook to do it. She makes the beef-tea herself, steeping it in cold water and bringing it to the simmer, as is proper, and sending it over fine and

hot by Phemie, who, 'tis said, is more than willing. Kathrine Fenwell, too, as is fitting in an old friend, is said to be calling in whiles. Since when the lad is getting along quite middling. You'll be glad to hear that he finds my blueberry cordial more strengthening than the kind put up by Mrs. MacAllister.'

The next letter reported a great improvement in the invalid's condition. 'So much so, Euan, that you would wonder. But there's no thanks to Abigail Binns, I'll say that. Mrs. Ellis tells me that she is much put to it to find places for all the things which Garry's friends bring in, even though she has a large appetite herself (Mrs. Binns, I mean). So this is to let you know that Garry is gaining finely and is now able on a bright day to walk a block or two of the Avenue with Phemie or Ellen or Kathrine, as the case may be. But they say (not Mrs. Ellis) that it's oftenest Kathrine, especially on Saturdays when there is no school.'

Euan laughed as he thought of the offerings of distressed damsels on Mrs. Binns' pantry shelves . . . he smiled at the idea of the Rector living on tapioca cream and custard pudding . . . he was amused by the picture of Garry promenading the Avenue on the arm of Phemie Ellis . . . or even Ellen Nichol. But, before another picture which his letter showed, his face grew strangely sober. He saw this picture plainest of all — Kathy and Garry strolling down the Avenue, slowly pacing through the sunlight, over the crisp snow, patterned by the bare-branched trees . . . he could hear their voices . . . Kathrine's with that abrupt, questioning note which came when she was interested . . . Garry's pleasant monotone . . . a great nostalgia swept over him — college, work, future, seemed nothing besides the one crushing desire to walk down the Avenue with Kathrine.

It was, indeed, a distressful fact that several of Janet's letters, written about that time, got crumpled up and thrown into the waste-paper basket. Euan, always assuring himself

that he didn't care, was furious because he cared so much. But even at that the final blow was a bolt from the (comparative) blue. It came first when Euan was hopefully expecting to hear of Garry's early return to college.

'The real news this week,' wrote Janet, in the rôle of a messenger of the fates, 'is that Garry Emigh and Kathrine Fenwell are betokened. I have it direct from Mrs. Ellis. You'll be thinking little of my wits, Euan, that I did not jalousie this before. But maybe it's not so much that I did not see the set of the wind as that I did not want to see it, for there's more haste in this than is becoming in such matters. Moreover, Euan, your mother is not one that cares for gossip. Howsomever, there's no doubt about the matter now. Phemie Ellis has taken it hard — hysterics they say — and is off to visit an aunt in the country. If a daughter of mine behaved like Phemie, I'd know how to sort her. I would that (but a daughter of mine would not be doing it). The feeling is that Kathrine Fenwell has done well for herself, though when they're marrit she will be expectit to attend the Episcopalian Church, which is a pity. How the Rector himself will thole Gilbert Fenwell as a relative is another matter. There are those who say (though I say it not) that the poor man is ill pleased.'

Euan did not crumple this letter. He laid it down carefully. Then he lit his pipe. He had taken to pipe-smoking so recently that the lighting-up was still a ritual. To-day he lit it very carefully and, when it was drawing freely, let it go out. And it was a long time before he remembered to take the cold pipe from his mouth.

So that was that!

Garry and Kathy were going to be married . . . Garry and Kathy . . . a most natural thing! He wondered that he hadn't thought of its naturalness before. Garry and Kathy had always been such friends . . . but friends didn't get married, did they? . . . he hadn't thought of friends getting mar-

ried . . . if he had thought of it — but he hadn't . . . no use thinking of it now!

Now that the thing had happened, it seemed to have been inevitable from the first. He couldn't understand why he had not seen it coming. Perhaps Garry's talk about the celibacy of the clergy had blinded him. As if, in the matter of marrying Kathy, a small trifle, such as that, could have had any weight. But even if he had not been blind, it would have happened just the same . . . bound to happen . . . and why not? . . . Getting married was all right for Garry, but he, Euan, had his work to think of. He became very busy and neglected his mother.

Janet had time to grow anxious over the delay before his answer to her letter reached her. It was a short note written, as he explained, with some exams in the offing. Her news had been quite a surprise — great news, though! He must write his congrats . . . Garry, he supposed, knew what he was doing, though in the Medical it was considered a mistake for a man to engage himself before finishing his Course. Still, in Garry's case — well, it was nobody's business, anyway.

Janet read the letter to Andrew that night before they went to bed. The boyish phrases sounded strangely on her prim lips. But her eyes were dark and troubled with understanding. When she had finished, they were both heavily silent.

'Had you suspected this, Andrew?' asked Janet in a stern voice.

'Aye,' said Andrew. 'But so did yourself.'

Janet's sternness wilted. 'I was feart,' she admitted, 'but I was no lettin' on. The lad is young — and young lads change.'

The wagon-maker shook his head.

'There's bad blood in the Fenwells,' said Janet.

Andrew rose and knocked out his pipe.

'If that's a comfort to ye, woman,' he said, 'you're welcome. For you know fine and well that Euan will not change.'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE rumour current in Blencarrow that the Reverend James Dwight disapproved of his nephew's engagement was based entirely upon imagination. But imagination is sometimes an excellent base. Having no means of knowing how the reverend gentleman felt, Blencarrow was forced to imagine feelings for him. A clergyman, they argued, could have but one emotion regarding the admission of Gilbert Fenwell into his family. And quite properly. Therefore, that was how the reverend gentleman felt.

The assumption was at once right and wrong. Mr. Dwight did not approve, but the existence of Gilbert Fenwell had nothing to do with his disapproval. His feeling was founded upon something quite different and was fortified by a knowledge of human nature which all clergymen should have, and some do. Mr. Dwight was very fond of Garry and he understood him far better than Garry would have believed possible. Unblinded by any intense emotion, since the real flame of his soul was turned elsewhere, the Rector's serene grey eyes saw clearly. And just now their serenity was troubled.

With all the good will in the world, Mr. Dwight could not feel, as Euan tried to, that what had occurred was the one inevitable thing. He wasn't at all sure about anything being inevitable. And this engagement especially seemed like something which might have 'just happened' — the result of an off chance of illness and propinquity. He had seen no signs of a sudden passion on Garry's part, and yet he believed his nephew to be capable of such passion — had, indeed, expected something of the kind some time.

If Garry, delivered by idleness and ennui into the hands of his weaker self (the self which craved care and indulgence),

had mistaken his pleasure in Kathrine's company and service for a much more serious feeling, the results were likely to be very serious indeed.

These forebodings on the Rector's part were largely the result of his having met Kathrine as she came out of the Rectory gate an engaged girl. He hadn't known the reason then, but her look of shining happiness had stricken him with premonition. Only from some dream world would such a happiness have come. There had been no reservation in it, no understanding even, just sheer joy.

It was all rather pathetic and very young . . . and his mature wisdom might be mistaken, after all. Why should one feel afraid of happiness as if it were something snatched at peril from the hand of a grudging God? The Rector warned himself to allow no doubt of his to foster doubt elsewhere.

It was unfortunate that he should have gone directly to Garry's room after his meeting with Kathrine. For Garry's face, as he saw it then, showed no reflection of the joy on hers. It showed only a still whiteness, with bewildered eyes. Reaction, of course! . . . natural enough considering the boy's state of health . . . nothing to worry about . . . and whatever it was, it had passed immediately. Mr. Dwight tried to think that he might have imagined the whole thing. Later on, Garry had seemed enthusiastic enough.

As for the boy's changed attitude regarding his chosen work, Mr. Dwight was not unduly disturbed by that. He had always doubted Garry's fitness for the joys of celibacy. He felt relieved rather than otherwise that he would not now ignorantly obligate himself.

He had not mentioned the subject until Garry himself broached it with his usual hesitation.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you do not feel that this need interfere at all with my — my decision to enter the Ministry.'

'If your desire for the work is as deep as ever, certainly not.'

'Oh, it is,' Garry assured him eagerly. 'Deeper, I think. Perhaps my former outlook was a little narrow.'

Mr. Dwight smiled. 'You can hardly expect me to admit that.'

'No, of course not — what I mean is — well, it's just that you and I are different.'

The confession came with a rush, and not until he thought of it afterward did its full significance dawn on Garry. If it were true, and it must be true, its admission marked the death of a boyish ideal. He had so longed to be like his uncle: . . . a foolish ambition, no doubt. No one is like any one else . . . Wasn't it Kathrine who had said that? He remembered suddenly a schoolboy conversation with her upon this very point. He remembered her tone, a little higher than usual, 'I don't believe you are a bit like your uncle, Garry, not a bit.' How annoyed he had been with Kathy for saying that! . . .

But of course she had been right. He would tell her so some day. They would laugh together over his confession of how unpleasant his disillusion had been — that moment of complete dismay, for instance, when, still dazed with the magic of their avowals to each other, he had turned to find his uncle standing in the door and the unbidden thought had come: 'I shall never be like him now . . . never, never!'

He hoped his uncle had not noticed.

'I met Miss Fenwell by the gate,' Mr. Dwight had said in his precise, kindly way, 'so I know you have not been lonely . . . I fear Mrs. Binns has neglected the fires again. The room seems cold.'

'It is a trifle cold. I — we did not notice it.'

'I will speak to Mrs. Binns. In the meantime, take this rug. You have had your tonic?'

'Kathrine gave it to me.'

'A lovely girl, Garry, unusual . . . a certain distinction . . .'

The wonder of Kathy had flared up in him anew. The bad moment had passed.

'She is glorious!' Then, after the faintest pause, 'I have asked her to marry me, Uncle.'

He had said it proudly. The cold room had become warm again. Warmth was in his voice and on his face. Mr. Dwight must have felt it. Garry hoped he had. He wanted his uncle to know how happy he was.

For he was happy. The days which followed had left no doubt of that. Even the thought of Father Harmon's disappointment could not seriously cloud his happiness. When he went back to college, he would be able to make Harmon understand. It would be foolish to try to do it by letter. There was room for all kinds of misunderstanding. The older man might think that he, Garry, had betrayed his principles, whereas he had merely changed them.

The change had stolen upon him slowly — not without due thought, although the final revelation had come suddenly. There had been denial, and struggle even, until he had seen the worth and beauty of the thing he struggled against. Harmon, perhaps, had never seen that. There was a sort of blindness in Harmon. He, himself, had been blind until the revelation of Kathy.

He remembered his surprise when he first realized how necessary Kathy had become. It happened one day when she had routed Mrs. Binns, horse and foot, by insisting that his hot-water bottles be really hot. How quiet she had been, but how determined! Mrs. Binns had fled before her.

That feeling of surprise had been the beginning of it. Dismay had followed. Dismay and a rallying of his forces to meet a newly sensed danger. He had not given in easily. Not at all. When Kathrine, that day, had said, 'I'll run in again to-morrow, Garry,' he had answered casually, 'No, please don't bother. I shall be quite all right.' . . . Phemie would have pouted at that, but Kathrine merely nodded

agreement. 'I suppose you do get tired of being fussed over, poor thing,' she said. And she did not come to see him for ten whole days. During those days he realized things. With a not unpleasant thrill he recognized that Adam Harmon had been right in believing that he was not to come through unscathed. He was going to have his fight. After that he would be safe.

The main thing was not to think of Kathrine at all. Or was it? Wouldn't that be shirking the issue? Wouldn't it be better to think of her a great deal? To face the temptation and conquer it . . . that is, if he finally decided that it was a temptation . . . In making a sacrifice it is well to realize exactly what one is giving up.

For two weeks he felt firm about giving up Kathrine. Then he began to wonder how Kathrine might feel about it. And thoughts along this line excited him so that he became alarmed. Supposing there was nothing to give up? Supposing Kathrine wouldn't look at him in any case? . . . Well, that ought to make it easier . . . only it didn't! . . . If there were only some way of finding out.

There did not seem to be any way of finding out. Kathrine was always the same, frank and friendly, and getting prettier every day. Garry thought she bloomed under his eyes. A wonderful girl! Not at all like the girls he knew at college. Not like Ellen or Annabel. Not like Phemie Ellis. Not like anybody. And very likely she didn't care a hoot about him. And if he gave her up without knowing, he would never know. Still he would give her up — if he felt sure that was the right thing to do.

The trouble was that he felt increasingly uncertain as to what was the right thing. Was it not possible that he had been presumptuous in thinking himself fitted for the austerities of celibate life? Could vanity and a desire to be like his Uncle James have misled him?

At this stage he decided to deny himself to callers. A little

solitude might do good. He instructed Mrs. Binns to deny him to everybody. But Mrs. Binns had her own ideas about that. She had no desire to be saddled with the sole care of an increasingly hearty convalescent.

'Mr. Garry says as 'ow 'e is not at 'ome, Miss,' said Mrs. Binns in a sighing voice next time she answered Kathrine's ring. 'But there! when a body's low in their minds, they'll say hanythink. If you'll take my hadvice, Miss, you'll go strite up.'

Kathrine, entirely innocent of Garry's struggle and thinking only of his health, went straight up.

'What's the matter?' she demanded unfeelingly. 'Mrs. Binns says you are low in your mind. Has she been trying to feed you suet pudding?'

Garry smiled wanly. He was looking pale. And he didn't respond to treatment. He was very restrained, not to say dumpy. He refused to cheer up. Kathrine brought out all the town news, including the latest in the local feud between Archibald J. Jones, Chief of Police, and James Duffy, night watchman. Jones, it appeared, had haled his (supposed) underling before the magistrate on the charge of addressing him by improper and incomprehensible names.

'What did you call him, Jamie?' asked the magistrate.

'Nathing a'va,' said Jamie innocently. 'But I maybe said he was a Sassenach.'

The magistrate, being a MacTavish, declared the word both proper and comprehensible.

'The man only said you were English,' he told the chief, 'and you are English, any one can see that!'

Garry had barely smiled at the story and Kathrine was justly annoyed.

'I think it's funny,' she said. 'But if you won't cheer up, you won't. I'm going home.'

'And you'll never, never speak to me again?' said Garry, and then, in an entire change of tone, 'Oh, Kathy, don't go!'

He had looked so depressed that the girl had taken alarm. Could he be having a relapse?

'Garry,' she said, 'I do hope you haven't been doing anything foolish?'

By 'anything foolish' she meant sitting in a draft or forgetting his rubbers. But the anxiety in her eyes was plain and, as she spoke, she innocently laid a hand upon his wrist.

Garry let his free hand close over it. It was not an unreasonable action, neither was it an impassioned one. He intended it as a sort of farewell touch . . . of renunciation . . . he was really giving Kathrine up.

But Nature, tired of his shilly-shallying, decided to settle things on the old lines. Garry's grasp tightened, grew virile. He found himself looking deep into Kathrine's long fringed eyes . . . his inhibitions fell away.

'Kathy!'

Neither of them recognized his voice. The startled girl drew back . . . It was the age-old instinct of retreat. Instantly there leapt in him the instinct to pursue.

'Kathy — dear — don't go!'

The lovely cream of her cheek turned slowly, delicately pink. The startled eyes veiled themselves. Something within her beat desperately in the pulse of her throat. For an instant, will, instinct, whatever you like, strained back, sought to recover itself, then went down in glorious surrender. Her lips softened and gave themselves to his.

'Kathy!' repeated Garry fearfully.

'Oh, Garry!'

She let herself sink beside his chair, hiding her glowing, betraying face in its worn cushion. For in Kathrine then there were no questionings. Her dream, compounded of long girlish thoughts and hopes only half believed in, had suddenly come true . . . it had always been intended to come true . . . it was truth itself. That first moment, long ago, when they had met in the dusty, golden loft of the wagon

shop — that moment and this moment were one and the same . . . time was only a name . . .

When she raised her head, she left a happy tear upon his hand.

Garry wouldn't have been human if he had doubted then. 'Oh, my dear,' he said, 'how wonderful it is!'

They talked for a time, disjointedly. Neither ever remembered what they said. It was Kathrine who first noticed how late it was, and how pale Garry looked. And how hot his hands were.

'Oh, I must go!' she cried, springing up. 'The doctor said —'

'Silly old doctor!' He kissed her again and again, clinging to her hands.

'No, you mustn't! I'm going now. There's to-morrow, you know. All the to-morrows!' Her smile illumined them.

'Early, then!' he begged . . .

He watched her from the window, beautiful and gracious as a young pine against the snow. The gate clicked. He shivered a little, for the room was cold.

It was at this moment that he had turned to see his uncle in the doorway.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FOLLOWED for Kathrine a period of unquestioning happiness. She held the treasure of her joy delicately, fearfully almost — like sacred oil in a vessel. She told no one save her mother of the wonderful thing that had happened to her. But as every one seemed to know almost at once, it is probable that Mrs. Binns did not practise the same reticence. Almost the last person to hear the news was Gilbert Fenwell, for when Garry, as in duty bound, had suggested the propriety of consulting Kathrine's father, Lucia had begged him to let the matter rest. Her fears of the effect of Gilbert's reaction upon a young man of fastidious mind were only too well founded. So it was just as well that Gilbert's first knowledge of his daughter's engagement came by way of a cronic at the North American. In that environment the paternal comments seemed less lurid. Also, owing to the preliminaries of the evening, they were largely unintelligible. This was fortunate, since Gilbert, on the subject of daughters, could be anything but edifying. With James Duffy, who, later, escorted him off the premises, his attempts to lay bare the feelings of a father's heart fared little better.

'Blethers!' said Mr. Duffy stolidly. 'Think shame for a mon in your condeetion to be speakin' the lassie's name, Gilbert Fenwell! . . . an' dinna try to walk on yer heels, yer heid winna stan' it.'

'It's the black ingar — ingrat'tude, Duffy,' said Gilbert, weeping. 'Serpent's tooth, as Bible says! Here'm I bringing that damn g-girl up like a d-damn Fenwell an' —'

'Walking on yer toes will na help ye either,' remarked Mr. Duffy dispassionately. 'Guid sakes, mon, can ye no pit yer feet doon flat?'

Gilbert put his foot down flat and swayed gently. He

wished to prove to an unsympathetic world that his emotions could not overcome him.

'What I want t'shay,' he remarked solemnly, 'is, women's the devil. My wife iss devil — quiet devil . . . Duffy. What I shay iss — quiet kind's the worst! But there's ways of taming devils, Duffy, there's ways!'

'Is there?' said the night watchman indignantly. 'Well, just you let me see you takin' any o' them an' the experience will no be as pleasing as ye think. James Duffy has his eye on ye, mind that!'

Being, however, well versed in the various manifestations of Gilbert's possibilities, he knew that his charge was harmless for some time to come, and hoped that by the next sober interval the poignance of parental grief would have moderated.

'Howsomever, it's time that they weemen had a man to look after them,' he murmured. 'And belike the lad Emigh may be better than none.'

This cautiously favourable verdict of Mr. Duffy was largely echoed by MacIvor's Step. The Step, indeed, considered that both parties might safely be congratulated. On the one side, Kathrine might be expected to preserve Garry from Romanish notions and highfalutin ideas about parsons not being decently married. On the other, Garry had shown a manly recklessness in the matter of fathers-in-law which it was hoped Kathrine would appreciate.

'Not but what I always go against a man marrying his wife's hull family,' said Æneas Sowerby, with a sigh. (Mrs. Sowerby's family was somewhat large.)

'And maybe Gilbert will not be lasting long himself,' said Timothy Burke hopefully, 'whereas there's good stock in most families as well as bad. I shouldn't be at all surprised, now, if Gilbert is just a "come back" as it says in the books.'

'"Throw back" is what you mean, Timmy,' said Roger MacIvor mildly.

'Throw or come, it's all the same,' said Timothy. 'What I'm meaning is that his grave will hold what's left of him. He'll not be handing himself on to the next generation.'

The Step accepted this view of heredity with reserves. It wasn't quite sure that it provided properly for predestination.

Meanwhile the lovers, or, in Blencarrow's more decorous phrase, the engaged couple, were happily unconscious of everything save their own remarkable experiences. Compared with the new world into which they had stumbled, the world which held Blencarrow was a negligible planet. Its existence must not be allowed to interfere ever so little with the precious days of holiday remaining — for Garry, now almost well, must soon return to college. If it had not been for Kathrine's school duties, they would scarcely have been separated. Even as it was, the children found their teacher smiling and distraught, and grew accustomed to being unduly hurried through their leave-takings on account of some one waiting for somebody in the next block. One infant, especially bright, expressed itself in song:

'Oh, oh, oh!
I seen Miss Fenwell's beau!'

After which Kathrine curbed her impatience and Garry waited farther off.

Fresh air had been prescribed for the invalid's convalescence and they walked a great deal. They had their favourite streets, their meeting-places, their sheltered nooks and corners where they could linger in the last of the winter sun. Wherever they went, they wove memories. At least, Kathrine did. For long there remained, for her, corners which she could not take without a quickened heartbeat, streets through which she never cared to walk alone. The sight of Miller's pond, lying shining in its hollow, had power to stir her heart with long persistence. For first love, though it

may pass, and often must, gives in its passing more than life can take away. Little or large, its legacies remain.

The magic worked for Garry, too, though differently and in more earthly fashion. He had done with doubting. The strength and glory of life were flooding back. Just to be free of the weakness and lassitude of illness was endlessly delightful. The sight of Kathrine in her short, trim, skating-skirt and her little brown turban, edged with soft fur which Con had sent, was a tonic which, he told her, might have set a dead man on his feet. It was something like having the best of the old carefree school days back again, back with an added zest and a quickened promise of to-morrow . . .

Nevertheless, as health returned, the desire for work returned also. It had been a wonderful interval, but he wanted to get on with things. 'More than ever now,' he whispered to Kathrine.

There was nothing unnatural in that. Kathrine's answering 'I know' held no misgiving. Would not every hour of his absence bring the great day nearer? Still — to part so soon was hard.

'It's only for a few months, though,' reminded Garry cheerfully. 'Then summer and the long vacation.'

'Months?' said Kathrine — 'æons, you mean. I shall be old and grey and wearing spectacles by summer. I know I shall.'

They laughed at this and, the situation being favourable, Garry kissed the tip of her frost-pink ear. 'We shall be an aged couple,' he told her, 'but don't you dare wear spectacles or I warn you I shall propose to your younger sister . . . are you cold?'

'No, it was just a shiver. Do you know, Garry, I had almost forgotten I have a younger sister. You'll see her in the holidays. Mother had a letter to-day. I forgot to tell you. Gilda is coming home in June.'

'What a nuisance!'

'You wouldn't say that if you knew what it means to Mother. Besides, you'll love her. Everybody loves Gilda.'

'I shan't. I'm like Mrs. Binns, I can't abide people that everybody loves. It's queer, though, that I don't remember Gilda at all.'

'I don't suppose you saw her often.'

'Well,' with a shrug, 'let's hope she will continue to be largely invisible. We shan't want to be bothered with sisters this summer, mind that, Kathy.'

'Of course we shan't,' agreed Kathrine happily.

Garry left on a Saturday. There was no school, and Kathrine had intended going to the station with him. It would mean one more walk. They could take the longest way, down Yorke Avenue, across the park and over the bridge. But at the last moment she decided not to go to the station at all.

'A station platform —' Garry had suggested diffidently.

'Oh, no, *not* a station platform!' Kathrine's agreement had been instant. (Though until that moment the place hadn't seemed to matter.)

They said good-bye at the unfinished house, and Kathrine stood at the window which was really a door and watched Garry go — a pause at the gate, a wave of his hand from across the snowy road, a backward look from the corner, and then — emptiness.

But if Kathrine be immortal, immortal too is that scene she looked upon — the gate, the street, the maples at the corner and Garry's retreating figure eternally vanishing between them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHETHER or not time be a fiction of the mind, it is certain that one cannot pick up anything exactly where one dropped it. Garry had not expected to continue his college life as if nothing had happened. But neither had he expected to find so far-reaching a change in everything which before had formed so satisfying an environment. The special niche he had made for himself no longer fitted, with the result that his too-sensitive angles were rubbed at every turn. The old delightful communion with 'Father' Harmon was gone. Not that Adam Harmon made any difference in the outward manifestations of his friendship. But there had been a certain something. And now the certain something wasn't there. Garry found the spring months a long vexation and began to look toward vacation with an eagerness which was partly soreness of heart. Everything would adjust itself when once he was with Kathrine again.

For Euan, too, the spring went heavily. Reluctant to face catastrophe, he tried to act as if nothing serious had happened. He wrote hasty, sprawling letters of good wishes and congratulations to Kathrine and Garry and settled down to work. But the snap had gone out of things. He worked mechanically and amused himself without zest. Life narrowed down to the day that must be lived through. 'Dogged does it!' was his motto, and his new friends found him slightly heavy on their hands.

'What's happened to your braw Scot?' asked Madeline of Cynthia. 'I met him on the street to-day and he looks ten years older.'

'He was rather young,' said Cynthia.

'Full of sympathy, aren't you?'

'Full of common sense. People have to grow up.'

'Cynthia, do you know what's the matter with him?'

'No, I don't. There's some rumour started by that silly Carter boy about bad news and a girl. I think it very likely.'

'A girl in his home town?'

'Probably.'

'Then he won't want to go home the instant he gets his holidays. Let's invite him up to Muskoka and cheer him up.'

'Um. I'll think about it,' said Cynthia.

Madeline cast her a swift glance. 'Going to wait for him to grow up, Cyn?' she asked.

'Maybe.'

'Isn't it dangerous?'

'Why should it be?'

'Well — there's the other girl, for one thing.'

'Was, you mean. Besides, why shouldn't one take a risk? It always amuses me that man alone is credited with a pursuing ego. Why lose a thing you want for lack of a little enterprise?'

Madeline gave vent to her soft giggle. 'Oh — enterprise!' she said. 'Reminds me of the black mammy who did our washing. She used to say, "Don' you know, honey, a gen'elman is de only thing dat can't be got by gittin'?" . . . You're an awful baby, Cynthy, for all your airs.'

'And you, O ancient one?'

'I'm an old soul,' said Madeline. 'And the last time I played with edged tools I cut myself.'

'Cowardy Custard!' said Cynthia, with her most unmedical grin. And in due time Euan received a warm invitation for a fortnight's camping in Muskoka.

Garry had an opportunity for camping, too — that is, he would have had it if circumstances had been different, but Father Harmon's invitation had taken refusal for granted. He had said:

'No use, I suppose, in asking you to come into the mountains this summer, Emigh?'

And Garry had responded with the half-embarrassed smile which the inference seemed to demand. Mountains, and the severe society of Father Harmon, could not be expected to attract a newly engaged man. And yet, such a very little while ago, the prospect would have meant so much!

He prepared for his return to Blencarrow with a nervous eagerness which he liked to feel was proof of his impassioned desire to be there. His letters told Kathrine that he was childishly marking off the days on the calendar. They were good letters, full of college news, and comment upon life in general. Kathrine thought them wonderful, but read and re-read them as if through much searching she might discover something beyond and beneath — something which, perhaps, people couldn't put into letters at all. She thrilled to the bit about the calendar. As for herself, she had found it easier to turn her calendar to the wall.

When the great day arrived, Garry, whose train left early, was up and ready a full hour before there was any need, but, becoming involved in small indecisions, had to run to make it after all. Nor was his nervous fluster improved by hearing a quiet chuckle and realizing that his undignified arrival had not passed unobserved. He turned, frowning slightly, to find himself looking into the amused eyes of Conway de Beck.

'Cut it rather fine, didn't you?' said Con, grinning.

Garry wiped his heated face and grinned back.

'Strange how one's spectacular moments appeal to one's friends,' he said. 'Where on earth did you drop from?'

'Oh — up there.' Con waved an arm vaguely toward the north. He had an air, as usual, of being too large for the space around him. 'Have a pew?' he offered, making himself as small as possible on the red plush car seat.

Garry looked doubtfully at the space indicated. 'If you could do something with your feet —?' he suggested.

Con shook his head.

'I tried leaving them out in the aisle!' he said regretfully. 'But people didn't seem to like it. What you'll have to do is to drape yourself over them. Lightly, please.'

'Going home?' asked Garry, squeezing himself in.

'Yes.' Con's grin, Garry noticed, was as carefree as ever. 'Behold the wild bushman snared once more and flung defenceless into the seething whirlpool of Blencarrow! It is my aunt's idea. "A little gayety," she writes me, "if indulged in moderation, does a young man no harm."'

They both laughed.

'Your aunt's an awfully good sort,' said Garry. 'Only I remember I was never quite sure whether she was laughing at me or not.'

'Oh, she wasn't laughing at you. But she is often mildly amused at things in general. She is what I call a detached person.'

'So is Uncle James. I wonder if it comes from not being married?'

'No, I don't think so. Some people are just made that way. I couldn't imagine Aunt married. Her personality wouldn't mix.'

'Does it have to?' asked Garry in a startled tone.

'Don't ask me. I speak without authority. But you ought to know — er — best congrats, and all that! Say, you rather stole a march, didn't you? Where was Euan?'

'Euan?'

'Heard from him lately?'

'Not very. But he wrote to us both at the time.'

'Yes, he would. I intended doing the same. Perhaps I did?' hopefully.

'You did not.'

'Well — I don't suppose you need any one to tell you how lucky you are?'

'Hardly.'

'That's all right, then. Besides, I didn't hear the glad news from you or Kathrine, either. Saw it, like all the rest of the world, in the "Blencarrow Herald." Nifty little write-up! They did you proud.'

Garry's expression became so black at this that the delighted Con proceeded gleefully: 'That's what it is to be a social *parti*. Don't worry. They'll have your photo and Kathrine's set in a true lover's knot when the time comes. And they'll call it "At Hymen's Altar." Very tasty — what?'

'Oh, shut up, Con! You don't really suppose they will, do you?'

'Sure to.'

'Isn't there any way to stop it?'

'A dark night and a rope over the nearest lamp-post.'

'But why? Girls — women — can't like it, surely?'

'Girls — women — do like it,' said Con. 'But Kathy doesn't. Unless she's changed.'

'She hasn't changed.'

'That's good. I never knew any one who needed change less. Lucky for you I didn't fall in love with Kathy. I thought I might once.'

'Kathy?'

'You wouldn't have had a chance, old chap.'

Garry, looking into Con's very blue eyes, suddenly laughed. 'I believe you mean it!' he said.

'Why not? At least, I don't mean it about Kathy because she and I were always intended to be friends. But when I do fall in love with a girl, it's going to be a sure thing.'

'Still the same sweet modesty which I remember from your youth!'

'Merely the fitness of things, my boy. I'm too big for a proper doormat.'

'A nice girl doesn't expect you to be a doormat.'

'No? — Well, as I say, you ought to know — think I'll try the smoker for a bit — coming?'

'Later,' said Garry.

He was not sorry to be left in solitary possession of the plush seat. There were things he wanted to think over. His thoughts had been disjointed of late — many things had been thrust aside with a promise of due consideration later. But there are limits to procrastination. The whole matter of his position and duties as an engaged man would have to be thought out . . . there were practical aspects . . . he did not want to fail Kathrine . . . or to give his uncle ground for supposing that — well, that he had acted in any undue haste. His choice, he reminded himself firmly, had been the one inevitable thing. Now everything else must fit into it . . . if he could only hold his thought to the problem, this fitting in should be simple enough. But his thoughts wandered. The real issues persisted in eluding him. Trifles of all kinds thrust themselves forward and his mind lacked energy to push them aside.

Even now, when his meeting with Kathrine was only a few stations off, he couldn't come to grips with anything, but sat there, idly staring out of the window and wondering why he had not been more eloquent in explaining his position to Adam Harmon. Why had he been so tongue-tied? . . . Of course, a man's intimate experiences cannot be communicated . . . but he might have made things somewhat clearer . . . probably Harmon had not realized the uniqueness of his case. Nor how different Kathrine was from the ordinary young girl. Kathrine was a personality . . . Absolutely . . . Would she meet him at the station? She might . . . It was Blencarrow's custom to meet friends at the station. He could hear Blencarrow saying, 'Well, I suppose Kathrine Fenwell will be down at the station to-day meeting Garry Emigh' . . . Various other persons, who had no proper

business, would be at the station, too . . . one mustn't mind trifles like that . . . trifles —

He gave an impatient jerk. This wasn't thinking out! He would never get anywhere unless he could concentrate —

'Chester!' yelled the brakeman, throwing open the car door with a bang.

The train was drawing into a small but pretty town very like Blencarrow. Like Blencarrow, too, was the gabled station, the planked platform with its row of three cabs drawn up along the side, its small bustle of summer traffic, and its one baggage-man in shirt-sleeves pushing a laden truck. There were many of these small stations on the line, and the train, known as an 'accommodation,' was scheduled to stop at them all. Nevertheless, it condescended loftily, pausing only long enough to give a warning toot, unless the engine needed water. Intending travellers must stand ready, bag in hand. The dilatory got left. And at Chester, it looked as if some one had been very dilatory, indeed. The conductor, hand raised, had just opened his mouth to deliver the fatal "Board!" when a cab dashed up to the platform and a vision alighted in a whirl of full muslin skirts and a confusion of handboxes.

Everybody in the train whose windows faced that way sat up a little straighter and stiffened with a passing excitement as the blowy skirts and the handboxes drifted effortlessly across the platform and onto the step of the car which had helplessly lingered to receive them. The puffing cabman followed with a large-sized telescope valise which the conductor caught with one hand while he swung himself aboard with the other. Then the station, platform, and cabman all slid away as if by enchantment. Only the vision remained, cool and smiling, in the aisle of Garry's car.

With a feeling of annoyance, Garry realized that the newcomer would have to share his seat. There was not another vacant place in the car. Already an obliging brakeman was

placing the bandboxes in the rack above his head. They were much too large for it. A lurch, at any moment, might bring them down ingloriously. Garry decided that the smoking-car was the nearest thing to safety.

But he had not decided quickly enough.

'Please don't move!' pleaded the vision in a sweet, unhurried voice. 'We can put the valise under the seat, can't we?' The rising inflexion lent a becoming touch of child-like confidence.

Garry found himself putting the valise under the seat (as much of it as could be induced to go) and courteously offering the window side of the seat to its owner.

'Oh, do you *like* to sit on the aisle?' asked the vision with surprised eyes.

Seen at close quarters she resolved herself into an unusually pretty girl in a green dress trimmed with ruffles. Skirts were worn full that year and it was the fashion to trim with ruffles. So it could hardly have been these accessories which helped to the adjective 'unusual.' Nor could the green muslin have been entirely responsible for a pleasing impression of green foliage from which a flower emerged.

Garry forgot his annoyance. The girl was only a child. And her face was certainly like a flower. He smiled tolerantly.

'You nearly missed your train,' said he in an elder-brother tone.

The girl's lovely lips curved themselves into a peculiarly winning smile.

'I had to,' she confided. And then, as if unable to conceal so tremendous a secret longer, she added, 'I'm running away!'

'With bandboxes?' asked Garry, startled.

'Oh, doesn't one have bandboxes? But I couldn't wear them all, could I?' The latter statement seemed as both explanation and excuse.

Garry said he supposed not. He saw now that the girl's face was a short oval and that her eyes were set widely apart under delicately marked brows whose questioning arch was indescribably attractive. Both eyebrows and eyelashes were of the same colour as her hair, a kind of darkened gold, like burnished copper where it held the light. Her skin was like a rose petal, soft and warm and faintly flushed.

'A piquant and arresting face,' thought Garry. He felt rather proud of the adjectives, there were so many others which he might have used.

'Do I look very hot?' asked the girl anxiously.

'You look particularly cool' . . . She really was only a child. Yet how could a child have chosen a dress which so exactly suited those gold-lashed eyes? Green — they were green like shaded water.

'When I jumped on the train,' said she, 'there was such a big young man — oh, there he is now!' The green eyes changed their focus, widening and darkening as they looked past Garry to the car door, blocked at the moment by the returning Con.

'Isn't he huge?' whispered the girl with something like awe.

'It's the car that's small,' smiled Garry. 'He isn't half so overwhelming against the landscape.' His tone had lost some of its elder-brother inflection. It was one thing to be helpful to a young girl travelling alone and another to be discovered by Con deep in friendly converse with a perfect stranger. He wished Con had remained in the smoking-car.

'Oh, do you know him?' asked the perfect stranger delightedly. 'He looks so exciting. And these people in front of us are getting out. Perhaps he will sit in their seat.'

'Perhaps he will,' said Garry, still more coldly. The couple in front were collecting their bundles and the train was tooting for a side station. 'As a matter of fact,' he added, 'I am sitting in his seat now.'

'No, you're not, old chap,' said Con's lazy voice. 'I gave it to you freely and with my blessing. There'll be plenty of room presently. I can sit next door.'

'We can both sit there,' said Garry, a trifle too eagerly . . . 'That will make you much more comfortable,' he explained politely to his companion. 'If you will allow me, I will move my bag' — his tone was almost too formal . . . anything to prove to Con's amused gaze that the pretty thing in green was a casual travelling acquaintance.

But Con, blind bat, was patiently waiting to be introduced. The girl, too —

'I don't think I quite caught the name?' murmured she. Her eyes were limpid. Her red lips were ready with a welcoming smile.

'Any one would think I'd known her for years!' thought Garry, annoyed. Still, one couldn't let a nice girl down . . .

'Conway de Beck,' presented Garry. But though he paused expectantly, the girl did not offer her name in return and neither she nor Con seemed to notice the omission.

'I'll turn this empty seat over,' said Con, with inspiration, 'and then we can all sit together. No, stay where you are, Garry! I have long ago faced the fact that I need a whole seat. My feelings are quite insensitive.'

'Don't you like being bigger than other people?' asked the girl. (One would think she had known Con for years, too!)

'That depends — on the other people,' drawled he. 'It is handy sometimes.' A reminiscent smile hinted at interesting memories. But though the girl's eyes invited him, he did not continue the subject. Con, Garry remembered, had a way of dropping subjects, very disconcerting to a polite conversationalist.

But the girl in green did not seem to know that the subject had been dropped.

'I think men should be big,' she observed judicially.

Garry turned to hide a smile. Not that it didn't serve Con right. He had been entirely too forthcoming. But Con was unperturbed.

'The attraction of opposites,' he declared. And though the words may easily have been a compliment, for the girl was dainty to a degree, they sounded more like a kindly administered snub. Garry's sympathy instantly veered. There was no need to be rude. He felt quite annoyed with Con, for the girl's strange eyes had turned to him again, and he thought they seemed a little hurt . . . where had he seen eyes like that before? . . . nowhere . . . but surely he had dreamed them?

There was an asking expression on her face as if she, too, were tracing some memory.

'I wish I knew who it is that you remind me of,' she said frankly. 'Have you had your picture in any of the papers — or anything?'

Garry shook his head. 'Absolutely nothing.'

'Ah, but wait!' interjected Con, 'if you will watch carefully the columns of the "*Blencarrow Herald*," you will presently see —'

The girl's surprised laugh cut his sentence.

'"*Blencarrow Herald*!"' she repeated. 'Why, how funny! — you see, it's *Blencarrow* I'm running away to!'

Over her head Garry and Con exchanged a glance — startled on Garry's side; amused on Con's.

'Then if there is still time to save the heroine,' said Con, 'take the advice of one who knows and — don't. Of all places in the world *Blencarrow* is the last to run away to.'

The girl ignored him. Her eyes were still on Garry's. And now he was sure they were child's eyes, questioning, a little fearful. Perhaps she really needed help, guidance? — all girls are not as self-sufficient as some — if only Con were not there, he might find out —

'*Blencarrow*,' went on Con with the air of a man who en-

joys talking to himself, 'is like a crab-box — fairly easy to get into, but, once there, they eat you for luncheon.'

'Of course you are not really running away?' suggested Garry, also ignoring Con. His tone was protective.

'And if there is anything left over from luncheon,' murmured Con, 'they serve it up minced the next day.'

The charming line of the runaway's mouth wavered a little. But her eyes were still for Garry and still questioning.

'Only from my cousin,' she assured him. 'You see, I was leaving fairly soon, anyway. And Cousin Elizabeth was going away too. The house was being given up and was all upset. There was to be an auction. I didn't think I would really enjoy an auction . . . Do you?' It was clearly deference offered to a superior judgment.

'Well, that depends—' began Garry.

'On the auction, of course,' finished Con briskly. 'If it showed signs of being one of the *al fresco* kind with draughts and all the parlour chairs in the front yard and the cousin shut up in a back room with a handkerchief—'

The wavering line of the girl's mouth curved into laughter. Her eyes danced back to Con's.

'How did you know!' she exclaimed. 'Why, Cousin Elizabeth had chosen the very room! And I'm sure she had some special handkerchiefs ready. "You and I, my dear," she said, "will be quite retired here. We can sit on the garden bench which the auctioneer says will not sell in any case and we can hear the bidding quite well through the side window. If the man takes less than I tell him for the cut-glass cruet, I shall tap upon the pane!"'

Her mimicry of an agitated spinster was perfect. Con's laugh echoed through the car. Garry laughed more restrainedly. He found it hard to follow the changes of this perplexing creature — one moment a child, searching for guidance, the next a sophisticated young person holding up to ridicule a presumably worthy relative. Or was the clever

mimicry just a piece of child's fun also? Looking at the soft, fine line of the profile beside him, he was inclined to believe the latter. He satisfied his conscience with 'I hope your cousin will not worry, just the same.'

'Oh, do you think I shouldn't have?' with hurt surprise.

'Yes, he thinks you shouldn't have,' said Con. 'And you know you shouldn't have. And your cousin will worry very much. And she will have a nervous spell. And the doctor will give her bromide and the auction will be postponed.'

The girl gurgled joyously. It was a most pleasing gurgle. 'It will be awful!' she admitted. 'Only not bromide because Auntie thinks it's drugs.'

'But—' began Garry.

'Oh, I shan't let her worry *long*,' the girl assured him. 'I'll send a telegram from the next station.'

'The next station is Blencarrow,' said Con.

Garry, with an uncomfortable start, realized that it was. They were practically home already and he had had no conference with himself at all. Nothing had been decided, nothing planned. He had not even prepared himself for meeting Kathrine on the platform — And here he was with the complication of a perfectly strange girl on his hands — a runaway girl — some one would have to look after her. And Con, for all his friendly nonsense, showed no intention of doing so. The last precious moments before arrival, during which he had intended to collect his thoughts, must now be given over to the lifting down of bandboxes and the dragging forth of telescope valises — but one thing, he swiftly determined, he would not do. He would not appear at the car door laden with bandboxes!

'If you are really getting off here,' he said to the girl, 'I will take your valise. My own is quite light. I can manage the two easily.'

This would occupy both hands. No one would expect a man with both hands occupied to carry bandboxes. But he

had reckoned without fate. A long arm reached over him and deposited the telescope in the aisle.

'I'll take the heavy luggage,' said Con cheerfully. 'Mine's checked. You take the millinery, Garry, and mind you don't get stuck in the door.'

Before Garry could utter the briefest protest, Con was halfway down the aisle. The girl, with murmured thanks, had shaken out her full green skirts and was following. Garry gathered up the bandboxes with a tightened lip.

Through the window, as the train slowed, he caught a glimpse of a girl's profile, an uplifted face, warm white, a dark curl blown across a delicate ear . . . Kathy! . . . Well, one of his problems was solved, anyway. He couldn't possibly kiss anybody with a bandbox in each hand . . .

The thing to do was obviously to pass the matter off lightly . . . a pressure of the hand — as soon as he got rid of these abominable boxes! — a whispered word or two . . . sentiment later . . . Kathy would understand — Kathy was good at following a lead. He would simply say, 'Hello, Kathy!' There are ways of saying 'Hello' which are quite nice.

There are. But Garry did not use any of them. He didn't do anything which in that last tense moment he had planned to do. He simply stood, bandboxed and helpless, while Kathy, with a startled cry, slipped past him, and, seizing the girl in green with both hands, cried:

'Gilda!'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GILDA FENWELL, leaning forward, gazed steadily at herself in the old-fashioned mirror. The room with its closed shutters was cool and dim so that her face looked back at her as from a pool of deep, still water. Gilda's mirrors saw so many faces — always her own face, yet never the face which was really hers. Sometimes, if she stood long enough, there was the tiniest, fleeting glimpse: she had caught such a glimpse a moment ago and her spine still shivered pleasantly with the shock of it. Gilda was inexhaustibly interested in herself.

She had been home a week. And already her mouth felt a discontented droop. 'Felt' is used advisedly for Gilda did not allow her mouth to droop discontentedly. It spoiled the line. She had been so tired of Cousin Elizabeth's! And now she was going to be just as bored at home . . . unless something happened . . . Gilda, giving up the search for her other self, sat back and thought of what might happen. Blencarrow, though appallingly like Chester at first sight, might present possibilities. There was her mother, of course. Her mother was much nicer than Cousin Elizabeth . . . 'But not exciting,' thought Gilda . . . Her father had apparently become negligible, even as an ogre. Except for the one baleful and mocking glance which had greeted her unannounced arrival, he had paid her no attention . . . And Kathrine was engaged. Gilda smiled her sudden impish smile as she thought of Kathrine's engagement . . . There were possibilities of excitement there — if one were careful . . . what a prig Garry had been on the train! . . . how stupid of her not to have recognized him from Kathy's snapshot — although the snap was so poor it might have been anybody.

It had been annoying to discover that of the two travelling

acquaintances one was engaged, and the other was practically an outsider. That is to say, as far as Blencarrow society was concerned. Nevertheless, she had been expecting the outsider to call for six tiresome days . . . and he hadn't called. Kathy said Con never called; he just dropped in. But he hadn't dropped in either.

Gilda let down her hair and began to brush it. She loved her hair and, knowing very well that Nature had made no mistake in fitting its shining beauty so closely to her small head, she never made the mistake of interfering with it. It rippled when it was meant to ripple and coiled when it was meant to coil — with one exception. One soft copper-coloured wave had been gently trained and deflected to hide a scar upon the forehead — a thin red line with a puckered dent in the middle. It was her one blemish and the bitterest thing which life, so far, had thrust upon Gilda Fenwell. She had never become used to it, never forgotten it, never forgiven the hand that had placed it there. She caught sight of it now in the shaded room, and her small white teeth met sharply. If Lucia Fenwell had hoped that the years might bring healing, she would have been undeceived had she seen Gilda then.

Very few people knew of the scar. Blencarrow had forgotten it. Blencarrow had almost forgotten Gilda, but Gilda intended to remedy that. She knew very well that, as a Fenwell, her title was secure. Lack of money might be a drawback, but it was not a barrier. If Kathy had dropped out, it had been by her own choice. Already a small pile of notes and invitations lay on the dresser. Already the more desirable of the young men were touching their hats on the strength of a long-distance acquaintance . . . 'Used to wheel you around in your pram, you know!' said Johnnie Carter with unblushing effrontery . . . Oh, there was no difficulty about fitting in! . . . only . . . 'It's not exciting,' thought Gilda again.

The only exciting person she had seen for ages and ages had been the big young man in the train.

The girl yawned dismally and, slipping the hairpins into her hair, crossed to the window. Some one was whistling in the untended garden. Gilda recognized the air of a childhood game —

*'Rosy apple, lemon or pear.
Bunch of roses she shall wear —'*

Gilda opened the slats of the green shutter softly and looked out. She couldn't see anybody, but the whistler continued gaily —

*'Take her by her lily white hand,
Lead her to the altar.
Give her kisses — one, two, three —
Mother's runaway daughter!'*

Gilda drew back with a dancing step. Her boredom had dropped from her. She had never heard the big young man whistle and yet she knew that it was he who whistled under the window . . . well, he had taken his own time . . . now, he could wait on hers!

Deliberately she brushed her hair again, dressed slowly, and hurried downstairs as one who has no time to waste. If Mr. Conway de Beck were in the sitting-room he would see —

But he wasn't in the sitting-room. There was no one there but Lucia, who was sewing by the window.

'Have you been resting, dear?' asked Lucia, looking up. 'Oh, I see you have changed your dress; why did you bother? The gingham was quite fresh.'

'That old rag?' Gilda sauntered to the open door, but there was no one in the garden either.

'Didn't I hear Garry come in?' she asked mendaciously.

'Not Garry, dear. It was Con. But he only stayed a moment. He came to fetch Kathrine.'

‘To fetch Kathy?’

‘To tea at his aunt’s, you know. Miss Tucker invited you both. But you did not want to go.’

‘Oh,’ said Gilda. Then, in a casual voice, ‘Is Miss Tucker his aunt?’

‘Didn’t you know? I’m afraid Kathrine and I forget that all these relationships must be new to you.’

Gilda turned from the doorway. She was angry. But she was too clever to blame others for her own stupidity.

‘I had forgotten that Con had an aunt,’ she said. ‘But now I seem to remember something. She’s queer, isn’t she?’

‘Queer? Not at all. But she is different. Kathy likes her very much. You met Con on the train, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Gilda, stifling a yawn.

‘I hoped you would like Con. He is like his aunt, a little different. But we do not see much of him since Kathrine’s engagement.’

‘Kathrine’s engagement?’ Gilda checked a second yawn midway. ‘Has that made any difference?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Lucia. ‘You can’t tell with Con.’

Gilda shrugged. But her eyes darkened. Evidently one couldn’t tell — with Con. And yet with most men telling wasn’t exactly difficult. She had known Garry to be in parlous case before she had ceased congratulating him on his engagement to her sister . . . Not that he knew it himself — yet. But Con had puzzled her. He hadn’t been indifferent. That would have been the unpardonable sin. But he had been detached. And he had been amused. Gilda preferred to reserve the privilege of amusement for herself. Therefore she had smiled and waited, vowing to lose no opportunity of getting her own back . . . She was still waiting. Opportunity seemed shy.

‘It’s nice that Kathy is so popular,’ said Gilda. There was no inflection of temper in her pleasant voice. Nor was there any cloud upon the face she turned to her mother. ‘If you

won't let me help you with the sewing,' she added, 'I think I'll put on my hat and run down to Caldicott's. I haven't been there yet. But, by the way, didn't there use to be a little boy Caldicott?'

'He's a big boy Caldicott, now,' smiled Lucia. 'Harold. He practically manages the store since his father's heart began to trouble him. If you would like to go down, there's a piece of lining you might match for me and some groceries for you to order at Gray's. Will you wear what you have on?'

'Isn't it nice enough?' — in surprise.

'Rather too nice,' said Lucia. 'Blencarrow isn't used to it — from the Fenwells.'

'But it's only a plain white frock!'

Lucia smiled. White, in Blencarrow, was the ordinary summer wear. Nine out of ten of the girls would be dressed in white that day, muslin or dimity, fairly stiff, well-ironed, and worn with sashes or girdles of varying colors. But the white of Gilda's frock was not muslin or dimity, neither was it stiff, nor did it support a sash. Its waist (fashion decreed waists) was outlined by a smart belt of soft, white suede. Its skirt, flared to fashionable fullness, was of lustreless material which fell with the grace and lightness of silk. The severely plain blouse was turned back in a long rolling collar, from which the girl's bare throat rose delicately.

'It's certainly plain,' said Lucia. 'But — I don't quite see how Elizabeth managed it, Gilda.'

'Managed? Oh, it was I who managed! Truly, I had an awful time getting the right clothes. This looks expensive, but it cost only a few dollars more than a silly old muslin. And I coaxed the pattern out of a little French dressmaker who made me swear I'd not let any one copy it. Not that I'm likely to. It really has style. Simple, too. Every girl who sees it thinks she can run home and make one exactly like it — until she tries . . . All it needs is new gloves. I suppose I can get good ones at Caldicott's?'

'I am afraid' — began Lucia. But she lacked the courage to continue. After all, the child had been home only a week. She would adjust herself presently. 'Perhaps I could mend the ones you have,' she finished lamely.

Gilda dropped a kiss upon her hair as she picked up her hat. 'No, indeed,' she said firmly; 'I can't have you adding to your work by darning my old gloves. I'll darn them myself some day and then they will do for second best. I shall charge the gloves, I suppose?'

Lucia summoned the last of her resistance. 'We have no charge account, dear. We pay for everything at the time. Kathy insists upon it. And we do not buy very much. Surely you know that, Gilda?'

'You mean I can't have decent gloves?' coldly.

Lucia hesitated. 'Oh, I think we might manage the gloves,' nervously, 'but—'

'Nice old Mums!' Gilda blew another kiss from the tips of her fingers. 'Throw me the family money-bag, will you? — and don't work too hard, I shan't be long.'

Lucia watched her go with a troubled smile. She knew she should have refused the gloves. But she had not learnt how to refuse Gilda. She dared not risk the beautiful new happiness of having her, not for a little thing like gloves! There were so many other, deadly risks. She shivered a little.

And as she watched her down the path, so lovely and so young, her heart, long schooled to life's unkindness, questioned and rebelled. Surely she had paid long ago for her great mistake. Were the children to pay, too? ... 'Not Gilda!' she said. Her thin hands clenched under her apron and her eyes raised themselves slowly to the cloudless blue of the summer sky. '*Not Gilda,*' she vowed. But, if she spoke to some antagonist, there was no reply.

Gilda, walking demurely down the sunny street, felt her temper improve. She was conscious of providing a sensation. Her confidence came flooding back. Men were only men

after all. If, after mature consideration, she decided to concern herself with Con-of-the-woods, let him look to himself. Under her breath she hummed, 'Rosy apple, lemon or pear' . . . Two people could play at every game! She turned graciously to the young men who lifted their hats. She wished they would stop and speak to her. But they were all too polite. The only person who did more than murmur a greeting was old Tony Becker whose proud boast it was that if the Queen came to Blencarrow he would step up and pass the time of day.

'Well, now, I declare,' said old Tony, 'this must be little Gilda Fenwell all growed up and pretty as a picter.' He advanced a large, brown-spotted hand, and Gilda, conscious that more than one pair of eyes were upon them, laid her own hand within it with a frank smile.

'Yes, I am Gilda,' she said. 'But I don't believe —'

'You don't believe you know who I be,' beamed old Tony. 'Well, I ain't much; I'm only Tony Becker. Your ma knows me and your pa and there ain't many in Blencarrow that I don't know. And if the Queen was to come along to-morrer, I'd just up and say "howdy."'

'How very nice for her!' said Gilda with her gay little laugh.

She was glad of the excuse of turning into Caldicott's. But again old Tony stopped her.

'You're not a mite like your sister,' he said, 'not a mite. But don't you mind that' — with a portentous wink — 'different folks has different tastes and we've all kinds of folks in Blencarrow.'

Gilda opened Caldicott's door with a heightened colour. What an odious old man! What horrid, spotted hands — ugh! . . .

And this was Caldicott's! Could it always have been like this? The picture in her memory had been of a long and lofty place filled with rich shadows, shining counters, and

fabrics which one must not touch. The reality was a quiet, narrow store, badly lighted. Halfway down, an archway and a few steps isolated the millinery department. Heavily carpeted stairs led to the upper floor. Yet, for all that, Gilda sensed at once that Caldicott's was a 'good' store. One could safely buy things here. There were no bargain signs anywhere. Gilda looked around with approval. One could smell money.

A tall young man with long, narrow face, aloof eyes, and an air which might have belonged to a duke (only that dukes don't seem to care for it) came toward her . . . 'Little boy Caldicott!' thought Gilda. Immediately her gaze became tentative and inquiring as befits a newcomer.

Mr. Caldicott inquired gently if there was anything he could do for her.

Gilda, being shorter than he, glanced up from under the drooping brim of her hat.

'Thank you. It's only gloves. I seem to remember—oh, there they are!—in exactly the same place.'

'The same place?'

'They might have changed it, you know.'

'You—er—remember the store?'

'Oh, yes. And I think—I'm almost sure I remember you. It is Mr. Caldicott, isn't it?'

How clear her eyes were. How charming the raised brows above them! For no particular reason Mr. Caldicott, as he admitted his identity, felt pleased to have had it recognized.

'You wouldn't remember me,' said Gilda modestly. 'I was such a little thing.'

But Mr. Caldicott, usually a slow thinker, had had an inspiration. Hadn't his mother said something about the little Fenwell girl being back?

'But, I do!' he protested gallantly. 'You must be Miss Gilda Fenwell.' There was a hint, just a hint, of patronage in this. It amused Gilda. She allowed her eyes to droop.

'Yes,' she said.

The one word had a curious effect. It seemed to admit all that could be said about the Fenwells and yet to stand clear of it. Harold found himself thinking, not of Gilbert Fenwell, whom he knew, but of old Colonel Fenwell, whom he had not known. The thought lent a warmer tinge to the manner with which he conducted Gilda to the glove counter and requested the clerk to show Miss Fenwell the new gloves.

'Not the very newest,' begged Gilda sweetly. 'I know what they are — and the price is shocking. Just something simple, but good, in the elbow length, please.' She threw the girl a confidential smile. Then, as if suddenly remembering, 'I wonder — have we a charge account, Mr. Caldicott? . . . but of course you wouldn't know.'

Mr. Caldicott, who knew very well every account on his father's ledgers, was again subtly flattered by being told that of course he didn't.

'Don't bother to ask,' pursued Gilda. 'I'll find out from Mother. I only need gloves to-day, anyway.'

With that she gave herself fully to the business in hand, merely nodding in reply to the stampeded Harold's assurances that it would be quite all right. She had dropped the seed from which the necessary account might usefully blossom. Gilda had never heard of the power of suggestion. But she used it continually and with excellent results.

In the end it was the new gloves which she chose. 'Not because they are new,' she told the clerk, 'but the silk seems to be of a slightly better quality. Don't you think it's a pity to buy inferior silk?' Besides the gloves, she bought a pair of stockings. There was enough money in the purse and one simply must have plenty of stockings. But she forgot to get the half-yard of lining. She forgot to order the groceries, also. There was nobody in Gray's grocery except old Gray and an errand boy with a squint.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GILDA was not mistaken in thinking that her homecoming had created a mild commotion in Blencarrow. The ripples of it spread to Euan, holidaying in Muskoka, and made him wonder, without knowing quite why, whether he had been wise in not going straight home. He couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was in some sense responsible for the Fenwell family. Of course, it was Garry who was responsible now, and yet — well, there were certain things in his mother's last letter that worried him. He decided to tell Mrs. Banks, the camp's chaperon, that he would not be able to extend his stay for another week. There was no real reason for staying, anyway, since Cynthia was coming with him to Blencarrow. Their friendship had progressed wonderfully, and Janet, secretly on fire with curiosity with regard to Euan's new friend, had written the warmest of invitations.

'Aren't you too venturesome, child?' asked Madeline, when Cynthia, after the briefest hesitation, had declared her intention of going.

'Venturesome, but not "too,"' said Cynthia. 'I'm going, Maddy. I've got to see that girl.'

'Oh! Kitty, kitty-cat!'

'I'm not. Perhaps I'll like her. I'm fairly sure she's engaged to another man.'

'In that case, you might. But it's you I'm thinking of. What's come over you, Cynthia? You never used to deceive yourself.'

There was no answer to this. Cynthia, who was ready for bed, blew out the candle. The tent was silent save for the squeaking of her cot as she climbed in.

'Very well — go!' said Madeline crossly.

They arrived, without announcement, about three weeks

after the return of Garry and Gilda; so once more all the players in this small-town drama were upon the stage and the action, which had lagged sufficiently, began to quicken.

'I hear that Euan is back,' said Lucia Fenwell at supper that evening, 'and that he has brought a friend with him — a Miss Wakefield. Do you suppose it's anything special, Kathrine?'

'Of course it is,' said Gilda, who was passing through the room carrying a large parcel. 'He's probably engaged to her. Everybody in this town is either engaged or going to be. It's worse than Chester.'

Lucia glanced uneasily at Kathrine, who seemed not to have heard. She often glanced at Kathrine lately and always with uneasiness. One never knew quite what Kathrine saw or did not see. Lucia had found herself hoping several times that she was not too clear-sighted.

Gilda's preference for Garry's society was merely boredom. But if Kathrine noticed it, she might misunderstand. So far, she hadn't seemed to notice. But one was never sure. This evening, for instance, she made no answer to Gilda's petulant remark, but merely asked what was in the parcel.

'Her primrose muslin, I think,' said Lucia. 'It came back last night.'

'Had it been visiting?' asked Kathrine with raised brows.

Mrs. Fenwell smiled nervously. 'I forgot I hadn't told you. Gilda sent it by express to that little Frenchwoman who has such good taste. She has made it look almost like new.'

'I don't doubt it.' Kathrine's tone was dry. 'Mother, what are we going to do about Gilda?'

'Do about her, dear?' The rising inflection in Lucia's voice held such uncalled-for consternation that Kathrine looked at her curiously.

'About her clothes, I mean,' she explained.

'Oh!' There was relief in the word. 'You mean you think she dresses too smartly?'

'I mean I think she dresses too expensively.'

'It's not like you to be grudging, Kathrine.'

'Yes, it is. I am the original Midas without the golden touch. And I'm going to be frightfully grudging with Gilda. I saw Harold Caldicott yesterday.'

'On the street?'

'In his office. I went in to pay our bill and I told him that, from now on, we would have no use for a charge account.'

Lucia's cheek flamed.

'What reason did you give?'

'No reason.'

'But wasn't it — wouldn't he guess?'

'I hope so.'

'But it's not fair, Kathrine. She is only a child. She doesn't understand. Your Cousin Elizabeth allowed her to charge things. She can't change all at once.'

'Yes, she can. Gilda can change more quickly than any one I ever knew. And she does understand. She is very clever. She knows that it's a case of thus far and no farther with Harold Caldicott. He is essentially good business. Gilda won't lay herself open to any unpleasantness. By the way, have you the address of the little French dressmaker?'

Lucia's betraying hand slipped toward her work-basket. 'I — I'm not sure,' she stammered.

'I'll write her to-morrow.'

Lucia rose. 'You take too much upon yourself,' she said with dignity. But even as she said it, the old nervous trembling fluttered at her lip. It was an unjust protest and she knew it. Sometimes she almost hated Kathrine! Hated her for her strength, her power to bear the burdens of others . . . if only Gilda had been like that!

'Will you write her yourself, then?'

'I will think it over . . . Kathrine, did you know that your

father had taken the two dollars which I left in the pantry for the milk?’

The girl smothered a weary exclamation. ‘I thought we decided never to leave any money in the pantry?’ she said. Then, relenting, ‘Don’t worry, Mother. It’s not worth it.’

‘It’s a long time since he has had so much at once,’ sighed Lucia. ‘It makes me nervous. I wish — is any one coming to-night?’

‘Yes — Garry. We were going for a walk. But we can stay in the garden if you’d rather.’

‘Oh, no,’ hastily. ‘It is much, much better for you to go for your walk. Your father will probably be late.’ She might have added, as a further probability, that he would not be home at all. But, against Gilbert’s indecencies, his wife and daughter had no shield save the decencies of silence.

‘You had better warn Gilda —’ began Kathrine, but her sentence was interrupted by the descending voice of Gilda herself. Clouds of primrose billowed gently as she floated down the stair.

‘Isn’t it perfect!’ chanted the voice. ‘Isn’t it a darling! Isn’t it a duck! Isn’t Mademoiselle the cleverest thing? She packed it so well, it scarcely creased at all. You’d almost never guess it was made over, would you?’

‘No, I shouldn’t,’ said Kathrine. ‘How much of the original is there?’

‘Oh, heaps — piles: all the underslip, anyway. And isn’t the touch of green becoming? Just exactly the one green that goes with primrose. There’s a scarf for my hat, too. Perfect!’

‘It certainly paid for making over,’ said Lucia, trying to assume a coldly critical air.

Kathrine laughed. But the comment on her lips did not leave them. Instead, she turned swiftly to the open door behind her. There was no one there — and yet she had been almost sure that in the greenish mirror above the mantel-

piece she had glimpsed her father's face, peering in . . . an old, bad face, but, just then, lit with the impish mischief of a wicked little boy.

If he had been there, he was gone. Lucia had not noticed. Gilda was swirling to display the width of her skirt.

'Are you going to have supper in it?' asked Kathrine tolerantly.

'Gracious, no! I'm not even going to *sit* on it. I'll change in a jiffy . . . Is jam all there is for tea? . . . Don't wait for me, will you? I'm not a bit hungry —' The cloud of green and primrose floated lightly back upstairs.

Kathrine sauntered to the door and looked out. There was no sign of Gilbert in the garden. 'On second thoughts I think we'll stay at home to-night,' she said idly.

But Lucia wouldn't hear of that. She found it difficult, indeed, to be sufficiently emphatic without arousing the girl's wonder . . . But surely Kathrine could not remain blind much longer? . . . The town was already whispering . . . that wretched young man! . . . And people would be sure to blame Gilda . . . as if Gilda, poor child, could help it!

Kathrine ate her supper with a good appetite. After all, there was no sense in worrying about her father. His moods were quite unaccountable. Perhaps she hadn't seen his face at all. He had not come in for supper. And he was not in the garden. She could enjoy her walk with an easy conscience.

It wasn't fair to worry Garry with family troubles, anyway . . . He had seemed to have worries of his own lately . . . he was thinner . . . nervous . . . Only last night, as they had sat in the garden, listening to Gilda singing her lilting little songs at the ancient piano, he had been restless and ill at ease. He had even changed the garden seat so that they could no longer see Gilda . . . 'Perhaps,' thought Kathrine, 'Gilda gets on his nerves . . . Well, to-night there would be no Gilda . . . nobody.'

Garry found her alone in the sitting-room when he came,

Gilda was nowhere to be seen. The sitting-room looked shabby and dull. Kathrine did not lend colour to her surroundings as Gilda did. She was independent of them, and apart. Garry was glad that Gilda wasn't there. So glad that the sharp twist of relief was almost pain. Gilda disturbed him. He blamed her for bringing back old doubts and questionings. She destroyed the peace which had seemed to come with Kathrine . . . made him wonder if it ever had been peace . . . If he could only keep away from her . . . but a devouring unrest pushed and prodded . . . certainty of any kind seemed farther off than ever.

They went out into the clear summer evening where a slim young moon floated pale on a sky of pastel green. Under the trees dusk had gathered and between the twin lilac bushes by the gate lay long grey shadows. Gilda was leaning on the gate. Against the dark of the trees her face shone, pale and luminous as the moon. Her skirts rustled softly as she moved to let them pass, and the ghost of a perfume stole from them into the night. Garry saw her strange eyes as she lifted her lids indolently to watch them go.

His step hesitated, then went on more quickly.

'You are very silent to-night,' said Kathrine after a little.

'Yes, poor company . . . I took Uncle's boys' class this afternoon, Kathy. I couldn't hold their interest at all. Boys are difficult to talk to, I think.'

Kathrine looked at him quickly. Something in his tone — could it have been a tinge of insincerity? — repressed the reassurances which rose to her lips.

'Horrid little imps!' she said lightly. 'I tell you what we'll do, Garry. When we are married I'll teach the boys and you can teach the girls. You won't find them nearly so inattentive.'

Garry responded satisfactorily to this.

'I suppose I deserve that,' he said swiftly. 'Seriously, though, I did muff things this afternoon. I was ashamed to

look Uncle in the face. There's something wrong somewhere. I wish I knew—'

'Not under the new moon!' said Kathrine impulsively. 'Wishes made then have a way of coming true!'

Gilda, when they had gone, discarded her languor with suspicious ease, and, humming gently, proceeded to the nearest post-box to post a letter. The letter was addressed to Mademoiselle Dubois and intimated that if she (Mademoiselle) were to receive a letter saying that she (Gilda) would not be able to indulge her taste in dress as formerly, such letter was not to be taken too seriously. Everything would be arranged — a little time might be necessary. Mademoiselle would understand.

She returned slowly. How horrid to have nowhere to go and no one to talk to on a night like this! Even Garry, sitting in the garden with Kathy and trying not to listen while she sang, would have been better than nothing. But Kathy had taken him away — wise Kathy — or had he run away?

Under the stimulus of this pleasing thought her step quickened. People who run away often run back. Besides, the night was still young. Some one might call. Gilda did not specify the 'some one,' but her heart leapt hopefully as she saw that her mother had lit the second lamp in the sitting-room. The second lamp meant a visitor, and a visitor meant distraction. Gilda tiptoed to the window and peeped in. A very large young man was standing by the table untying a parcel. A handsome young man with a lazy, contented smile. Gilda's spirits went up with a bound. Here was good hunting and game worth while. But there were weapons to be considered. The white frock she wore was quite nice, but the primrose muslin was much nicer. She stole in by the kitchen door and slipped upstairs.

In the sitting-room, Lucia Fenwell was exclaiming softly over a fur neckpiece which the opened parcel had disclosed.

Ever since, as a shy, wild boy, Con had elected to adore Lucia, he had not failed to bring her some tribute on his return from the Northern woods. The gifts, small in themselves, had lent a touch of colour to her drab life, so long barren of any gracious note of homage.

'It is beautiful, Con,' she said, 'so warm and soft. With it for a collar, I shall be able to make my old coat do quite well. It was dear of you to think of it. I—'

He saw her face change before he saw the cause. For Gilbert Fenwell's step was always soft. 'I did not hear you come in, Gilbert,' she ended steadily.

'I came in some time ago,' said Gilbert. His voice was suave. Lucia dreaded it most of all his voices. She knew at once and with miserable certainty where the milk money had gone.

'A present, Lucia?' he continued. 'May I see it? Thanks.'

'I think you know Conway?' Mrs. Fenwell's manner was perfect in what it ignored.

'Your young adorer, eh?' with a flashing smile. 'Yes, I think I know Conway. I think—'

But what he had intended to add was lost in a sudden cry of 'Mother!' from the stairway and the violent opening of the sitting-room door. From the unlighted hall a small fury burst upon them — Gilda, white and raging, in petticoat and camisole. Across her outstretched arm hung a confused mass of stained and crumpled yellow to which a strip of heavenly green still hung.

'Mother, my dress! Look at it! Mother—' the girl's words caught in her throat with a sobbing throb. 'My lovely, yellow dress—ruined!—some beast—' Her eyes fell on Gilbert's grinning face and she stopped dead. 'You!' she whispered in a sort of horrified understanding, and then again, 'You!'

Gilbert's answer was his sniggering laugh.

'He did it,' said Gilda in quite a different tone. 'Look,

Mumsie!' Her hands, strangely steady, held up the wreck of something which might have been a gown, but which looked more like the discarded plaything of a mad gorilla. Torn and stained and savagely trampled, its once pure yellow was now a thing obscene.

With a gesture of loathing the girl dropped the ruin at Lucia's feet and, stepping over it, confronted the man who, all pretense at control gone, was rocking and swaying with silent laughter.

'I would kill you if I could, Gilbert Fenwell!' she said. Her tone was steady and cold with hate. 'But for decent people you are dead already. Vile and rotten as all dead things are. They let you walk the streets, I know. But now, I warn you! Interfere with me again, lay one finger on anything of mine, and I will tell such tales of you that the vilest den in town will bar you out and the lowest sot slink past you like the plague.'

With her small clenched hand she flung back the curling wave of her hair. The scar it concealed gleamed redly in the lamplight.

'You may terrify my mother,' she went on, 'and Kathrine may keep silent if she will. But I will speak — and a man who *tortures children* will not be popular in Blencarrow.'

It is doubtful if he heard her. His rocking laughter consumed him. And his lucid spell was passing. The drug he had taken was shutting down. It was all very amusing, he knew that . . . but what was the fun about? He couldn't remember . . . a good joke . . . but the point escaped him . . . Saucy piece, that red-headed vixen . . . no respect for her father . . . needed discipline . . . needed . . .

Abruptly he checked the laughter and launched forth into a string of epithets, most of which were happily unintelligible to his wife and daughter. Muttering luridly, he collapsed in a nerveless heap upon the floor.

'Don't worry — I'll attend to him,' said Con placidly.

Without visible effort he lifted Gilbert by the coat-collar and deposited him, not too gently, outside the door.

'It's a warm night,' said Con. 'Let him sleep it off in the fresh air.'

Gilda, her brief defiance over, was sobbing wildly on the sofa. Lucia, who had stood through the whole scene as one hypnotized, seemed to recover herself only with a great effort. She spoke vaguely as if her thoughts were elsewhere.

'You must excuse us,' she said to Con, with mechanical politeness. 'We — I — I am usually — more careful . . . Gilda, go to your room, my dear. You are not properly dressed.'

'Bosh!' said Con easily. 'She's only a child. Better let her cry it out.'

His even, unembarrassed voice seemed to whisk the room back into sanity. Gilda sat up and stopped crying. She remembered that while tears, just one or two, may be becoming, a real deluge is certainly not so. And had she been right in hearing herself called a child? Besides, she was honestly shocked at appearing in a camisole. It was not her *métier*. For once she blurted out the truth.

'I — I forgot you were here!' she said.

And without further words fled the room.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CON let almost a week go by before he decided that it **was** his duty to say a word to Garry. During that week he had discovered a few facts regarding the private life of Gilbert Fenwell which he felt his future son-in-law should know — ‘Hang it!’ thought Con. ‘He’s the only man they’ve got — yet.’ He added the last word with a reflective smile.

The garden of the Blencarrow Rectory was a pleasant place in summer. Whoever had planned it had believed in trees and open spaces and had been inspired to add a red-brick wall on the sunny side. Here, under a murmuring maple and with the red wall, posied by hollyhocks, behind him, Mr. Dwight was accustomed to take tea. In this harmless fancy Mrs. Binns indulged him. It made ‘more steps,’ but saved ‘cluttering up’ the study.

‘Hif ’e wants hants in ’is sandwidges,’ said Mrs. Binns, ‘wot I says is, let ’im ’ave ’em.’

Garry was with his uncle under the maple when Con arrived. The hum of their voices in earnest conversation could be heard from the gate. So Con, who was never in a hurry, sat down to wait. He waited for the better part of half an hour before the Rector passed him going out. Con had the hunter’s trick of immobility when he chose to use it and Mr. Dwight passed him without a glance. He was in a brown study.

‘Been having a session with Garry!’ thought Con. He waited until the black coat disappeared and then whistled. The whistle brought Garry, flushed and inclined to be irritable.

‘Why didn’t you come out and have tea — stupid! Didn’t Mrs. Binns tell you?’

'Tea,' murmured Con. 'What is tea? Oh, yes, I remember, tea is English for civilization.'

'You had two cups the other day!'

'So I did. I am subject, at times, to civilization. It comes out in spots. But to-day I am my own man.'

'Nobody is,' said Garry gloomily.

'No? Do they teach determinism at your college?'

Garry's answer was an impatient sigh.

'I don't suppose it makes much difference, anyway,' said Con. 'As long as we think we're bossing things we are fairly contented.'

Garry sat down without replying.

'The young man appears morose?' suggested Con delicately.

'Oh, no — I was just thinking. I say, have you seen Euan since he came home?'

'No, I intend going over there to-day.'

'Do you know anything about the girl who is visiting them? Mrs. Binns says —'

'Good Heavens! Do I hear you quoting Mrs. Binns?'

'Well, this interested me. She says Euan has got himself engaged to this lady doctor.'

'He hasn't,' said Con promptly.

'How do you know?'

'The same way that you do. Euan's nuts on Kathy. You know that very well.'

'Used to be.'

'Is now and ever shall be. Euan is the original sticker.'

'It seems such a waste,' said Garry, poking holes in the grass.

'Oh, well, he's still young — that's the classical phrase, isn't it? Once Kathy is safely married, he may fall in love with Gilda.'

The small start which his companion gave was not lost upon the observant Con.

'Gilda?' repeated Garry.

'Kathy's little sister. You must have seen her about the house.'

'Don't be an idiot, Con,' coldly. 'And as for Euan — the thing's absurd. Gilda's a child.'

'Is she?' Con raised his eyebrows. 'Can't say that I've noticed it. Funny thing — age!'

'What do you mean?'

'Just one of my profound observations. Think it over when you wake up in the night, like the lady in what's-its-name.'

Garry began to fill up the holes he had made in the unre-sisting sod.

'Did you speak to Uncle as he went out?' he asked irrelevantly.

'No. He appeared to be thinking. I never interrupt thought. It's so rare.'

'I thought perhaps he might have told you the news. Uncle's had a legacy.'

'Another nephew?'

'No, thank Heaven! One legacy of that kind is enough. It's money this time. Two years ago when his half-brother died in England he made Uncle his residuary legatee. Only there was no residue. Since then some stocks have gone up. It's quite a nice little sum.'

'He'll put it into a stained-glass window.'

'He has made it over to me.'

Con whistled.

'Hence these tears?' he inquired. 'Well, it is sad. But where is your fortitude? Bear up, man. We are not in this world to consider our feelings.'

'If you are going to guy me—'

'I'm not. Only you do look down, you know. And the reason seems scarcely adequate. Where is the kink?'

'There is no kink. But there are obligations. Uncle has

got it into his head that with this money coming in, I ought to be married almost at once. It upsets everything.'

'Don't you want to be married at once?' bluntly.

'It's not what I want,' said Garry, 'it's what's right and reasonable. Kathrine and I have made up our minds to wait. We think it wise for me to be free of college first.'

'And doesn't Mr. Dwight see the sense in that?'

'Yes. At least he always has. Until lately. Something seems to have changed him.'

Con shot his friend a keen glance.

'He didn't say what?'

'No.'

They were both silent for a moment. Then:

'Your uncle is a very keen-sighted man,' said Con with respect.

'Why? I can't see anything very keen-sighted in breaking into a man's college course. A married man at college is a joke.'

'Is he?' in surprise. 'Well, yes, I suppose he might be. But you needn't let that worry you. It's a question of values. There are some jokes which one can well afford.'

'Not unnecessary jokes.'

'Oh, I see!' Con's expression brightened. 'You don't want it to look like the usual undisciplined rashness of youth. But how if there is a real necessity? — it's rather odd how things fit in — fact is, it was to point out something of the kind that I came over this afternoon.'

'You?' said Garry. The surprise in his voice held a definite note of withdrawal.

Con grinned. 'None of my business, you mean,' he said comfortably. 'Well, of course it isn't. But you can lay my bad manners to a lack of the civilizing influence of tea. Because I did come over to say that the sooner some one takes over the Fenwell household the better. Those women need a man to look after them.'

'I think you are intrusive—rather.' Garry's tone was very cool.

'I was afraid you might. But then you don't know how much a man is needed over there. I don't believe that any one in this blessed self-complacent village has any idea of what those women are exposed to. I've been looking around. I always knew that Gilbert was a bad hat. But I thought him fairly harmless. He isn't. I saw a small sample of his quality the other night. And I watched his wife's face. I tell you, there might easily be a tragedy there.'

'What do you mean—tragedy?'

'Look it up in the dictionary, child. Never let a word you don't know get by you! . . . Funny, I always feel something sinister about that unfinished house. It's waiting. What is it waiting for? . . . Gives you that feeling—well, so long! Sorry you're huffy.'

'Good-bye,' said Garry, aloof.

Con swung out of the Rectory gate and shut it with a bang. He was not at all troubled by his friend's aloofness. His own conscience was clear. Unpleasant as it is to mind other people's business, there are times when circumstance conscripts the most reluctant. And if a fellow can't see for himself, confound it!—some one has to tell him. No. It was not Garry who worried Con. It was his own state of mind.

Five days had now passed since the episode of the ruined dress. Con had not dropped in at the Fenwell house since. Yet not one of those days had passed without his having had to repel a strong desire to do so. Con was terribly afraid that he had fallen in love.

He used the old-fashioned phrase with a certain stoicism—and more than usual understanding. He had never laughed at the phenomenon for which that phrasing stood. It was not Con's way to laugh at natural phenomena. He knew the power of nature too well. He had told himself that

some day he might expect to fall in love . . . all the way . . . not side issues . . . or pleasant fooling . . . the real thing! But he had also believed, in spite of observation to the contrary, that forewarned was forearmed. It wasn't. He had believed, too, that love was blind. But his love wasn't blind enough. He seemed to see the girl who so strongly attracted him far more clearly than he wanted to see her. Impossible (for him) to see in Gilda the charming, guileless young person which it was her pleasure to suggest. But if his outdoor eyes had pierced a little farther into her covert than the eyes of most of his sex, he had not, any more than they, escaped the lure that lay ambushed there. His affinity for wild things betrayed him.

Had she not been superb that night when, breathing battle, murder, and sudden death, she had flung her girlish threats into the face of that laughing madman? . . . How small she had seemed! . . . how alive . . . a biting flare of yellow flame, frail, lovely, but with possibility of destruction immeasurable . . . Not the kind of flame which burns demurely on the hearthstone . . . not exactly a fire by which to warm one's heart . . . rather that touch of 'orange fire that tips the world's grey wing.'

Con had wanted very much to take her in his arms that night. But, instead, he had scarcely looked at her. Neither had he yielded, ever so little, to his desire to comfort the sobbing Gilda of the anticlimax. His knowledge of the chase stood him in good stead. Here was quarry which would run as far as he would pursue — but, if he did not pursue — there was a chance, at least.

During the week other opportunities had offered, but Con had taken advantage of none of them. He had not called, and at any of their brief meetings his eyes upon her had been amused and cool. Captive he might be, but never victim. This impersonal observation had annoyed its object more than she had ever been annoyed before. It was some-

thing new — and decidedly upsetting. It had whipped her into fresh flirtations, new audacities. It had made her glow and sparkle in public and stamp her feet in private. It made her behave very, very sweetly to Garry.

‘I’ll teach him to call me a child,’ thought Gilda viciously.

‘Heartless little flirt!’ muttered Con. And his eyes lost a little of their amusement.

There could be nothing serious in it, he felt that. Garry wasn’t a cad. Kathy was safe with him. But — walking away from the Rectory that day, Con had an uneasy feeling that safety might not satisfy Kathy. Neither had Garry’s sentiments on the question of immediate marriage been exactly calculated to satisfy anybody. Con was looking very serious when, just around the corner, he ran into Gilda accompanied (in business hours!) by Harold Caldicott. She wore no hat, an innovation deeply frowned upon in Blencarrow, and her cheeks were softly flushed by the sun. A tennis racquet (borrowed) hung from her fingers, and with it she gently slapped her soft white skirts which billowed in the breeze. Caldicott, dangling spotless tennis shoes, and looking miserably conscious of his companion’s missing hat, did not seem to be enjoying himself. Con’s jaw set itself firmly. His bow was remote — preoccupied.

Gilda, too, was preoccupied — with Mr. Caldicott. Her chiming laugh rang out as they passed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

EVERY small town may not be exactly like every other small town, but the resemblances between them are so many that an initiate of one is at home in any. Not so, the city-bred. To Cynthia Wakefield, Blencarrow was novel. She became, after the first few days, a little frightened of it. The impact of its novelty was almost physical. She felt, as she told Janet afterward, as if she had wandered into a valley whose surrounding hills shut off all vision. 'Don't be surprised,' she said, 'if one of these days I rush madly around trying to push back the scenery. Everything is too close — especially the neighbours.'

'But in the city I hear tell there'll be as many as three, or four, families in the same house!' exclaimed Janet.

'In the same building, yes. But in different worlds.'

Janet nodded, pityingly. 'Aye,' she said, 'I've heard tell of that, too. It must be fair lonesome to live in a place where nobody has a neighbour and there's no post-office, but only a man bringing letters to the door. Not but that there is such a thing as being too friendly like. But if you lived here, you'd learn whiles how to fend folk off.'

'I might,' agreed Cynthia cautiously. 'And, anyway, I am safe as soon as I shut the garden gate. I love shutting a gate. It's so homey.'

Janet gave her a glance of real affection. She definitely approved of Euan's friend. Already her mind was busy with possibilities. For, Kathrine Fenwell or no, inconsolable bachelorhood did not enter into Janet's plans for Euan. She divined in Cynthia, too, an understanding of the situation which she considered eminently sensible. True, the subject of Euan and Kathrine had not been spoken of between

them. But speech is a crude method of communication after all. Each knew exactly where the other stood.

As for Cynthia, she was content to wait. She had come to the stage where waiting was the one thing she could do. As things were, anything might happen. And she had no fear of outstaying her welcome. It was like that in the Cameron home; either one became a part of it at once or remained an outsider forever. Cynthia did not resent the understanding of Janet's friendly eyes, though she sometimes felt a little fearful under the deep-blue gaze of Andrew. Andrew was different. Sometimes she had the feeling that he could have put his finger on every fear and hope in her heart. But that he would never do so, she knew. There was a fine chivalry in Andrew Cameron.

The primary purpose of her coming to Blencarrow had been achieved almost at once. She had needed only to see Euan with Kathrine to guess how it fared with him. But she saw, too, that the very unselfishness of his devotion might be its cure. Let Kathrine find happiness in marriage and Euan might be free. One of Cynthia's beliefs held that a great passion flourishes best on tears.

It was, therefore, with consternation that she began to see, through the fine mist of Blencarrow gossip, a prospect of tears for Kathrine. If some of the Argus-eyed were right and Garry was seen far too often in the company of the younger sister, the present satisfactory state of things might shiver into fragments at any moment. Cynthia conceived an instant dislike for Gilda, could, in fact, have shaken her with all the pleasure in the world.

'Aye, she's a fair honey-pot,' declared Janet, whose sentiments were similar. 'And as for the lad, I'm feart he's a philanderer, no less.'

The word with its rolled *r*'s had such a devastating sound that Cynthia almost jumped.

'As bad as that?' she asked, laughing.

But Janet nodded darkly. 'Wait you, and see.'

Fortunately, or otherwise, Euan, in whom loyalty lay deep, seemed determined to notice nothing. What gossip he heard he met with a laugh. Garry was merely 'being nice' to Gilda — why shouldn't he? If, in his heart, the worried impulse which had hurried him home from Muskoka still troubled him, there was no outward sign. And it might have been pure accident that, more than once, he relieved Garry of the brotherly duty of 'being nice' to Gilda.

Meanwhile, the summer days slipped by and the great event of the season (perhaps of all seasons) drew nearer. This was no less than a monster carnival or 'Festival of Nations.' Nothing like it had ever before been attempted in Blencarrow. Bazaars there had been. Any small town may have a bazaar. Bazaars last, at longest, only one day. The Festival was to last two days, with a different programme afternoon and evening. The work which the affair would entail was stupendous. (Give Mrs. Sowerby credit for the word.) No single society would have been capable of it. But it was felt that the Presbyterian Ladies' Affiliated Societies were capable of anything.

There were objectors, of course. Blencarrow, like all Gaul, was divided into three parts. The party of the first part, being the Societies Affiliated, held that the Festival was destined to be a milestone in Blencarrow's upward path. The party of the second part, societies other than those affiliated, agreed about the milestone, but reversed the direction of the path. The party of the third part, known in olden days as the Populus, were happily detached and entirely willing to be led either way.

All the nations of the world were to be represented; that is, speaking by-and-large. Speaking more definitely, it was agreed that what Mrs. McCorquodale referred to as 'the lower Continents,' South America and Africa, did not lend themselves to representation, while the costumes of the Far

North would be much too warm. Turkey, Japan, and China could be handled easily. Had not Miss Amelia Skiffington, Mrs. Sowerby's niece, once been a missionary in China, and was she not intimately acquainted with all Oriental countries in consequence? Besides, she had a perfectly wonderful Mandarin coat and yards of embroidery which would be just the thing for decoration.

There was Mrs. Trent, too, who had voyaged to India with the Captain and knew how to drape yards and yards of dyed cheesecloth into the most fascinating Indian costumes and had an original 'chupattie' recipe. Even if the recipe proved unpalatable, the ordinary cooky would do just as well. Served, by draped and beaded ladies, on brass trays, the name alone would impregnate them with the true flavour of the Orient.

The Russian and Roumanian booths might give more trouble. But with fur around the tops of their boots, short skirts, brightly coloured aprons, and perhaps nice little round caps, the Russians would be quite effective. While tambourines, boleros, and artistic things like that would give the Roumanians a delightfully barbaric air.

The Dutch, French, and Irish booths — but why give away all the clever ideas of the brightest minds of the Affiliated Societies? Suffice it to say that all these booths and others had been 'thought out' most thoroughly. Nor had the practical side been neglected. There would be no foolish attempt to carry art too far. The Turkish booth would sell kitchen aprons, Russia would specialize on handkerchiefs and fancy articles, while Japan would handle the donated groceries, and India the refreshments. It is wonderful what societies, when properly affiliated, can do!

Surely, it was not surprising that all this energy and enterprise should stir up opposition — even had the party of the second part needed stirring, which some insinuated it did not. The disapproval of this party was entire and uncom-

promising. They found fault with everything. Where was the use, they said, of sending missionaries to India if the heathen dress and outlandish ornaments of its women were to be exploited at a (presumably) Christian entertainment? How preserve the proper attitude toward the yellow races if our young girls were to be encouraged to stick hatpins in their hair, to lengthen their eyebrows with lampblack, and to shuffle about in slippers without heels? As for the Turkish costumes! . . . well, of course, if we wished our daughters to ape the enslaved womanhood of Islam! . . .

The proposed programmes were also a source of sharp controversy. True, the proposal that fortunes should be told by cards had been nipped in the bud, but it was only after a scandalous struggle that a grab-bag and raffle tickets were finally ruled out. Dancing was known to have place in each evening's programme — exhibition Highland dancing on the first night and something less usual (and probably more reprehensible) upon the second. It was noted with mingled feelings that Mr. McKenzie had given his vote in favour of the dancing. Good man as he was, he was constitutionally incapable of seeing anything immoral in a Highland Fling. What were the party of the second part to think of this? If a Church Society, devoted (again presumably) to the welfare of the community, could countenance these strange performances, why not open a public dance-hall and be done with it?

The party of the third part listened to all this with great gusto and the happiest expectation. If the Festival went off with a bang, they were prepared with loud cheers; if, on the other hand, the affair fell flat, they would be able to feel quite as much satisfaction in the I-told-you-so triumph of the opposite camp.

Cynthia, being a stranger and therefore open to conviction, became a confidante of all three parties.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Sowerby, 'I am worn to a ravelling,

but I simply must keep up until this is over. It means so *much*. I feel so dreadfully about that charming little water-colour which your artist friend has so generously donated! We expected to make a really decent sum out of it by selling tickets. But some of the ladies felt that this might be too much like raffling it. So we are to have a guessing contest instead — how many peas in a glass jar, you know? Not nearly such a good scheme, but perhaps more suitable. Five cents a guess and the winner takes the picture. Even Mrs. Allenby could scarcely object to that.'

But Mrs. Allenby could and did. 'I see you are staying with us over the twentieth,' she said in her deep voice as she shook hands with Cynthia one day in the post-office. 'All I hope is that you will not allow this disastrous Festival to prejudice you against Blencarrow. If all I hear is true, you will see things there which will leave you deeply thoughtful. You will notice, I fear, a trend — oh, undoubtedly a decided trend! If, in a (hitherto) Christian town, such goings-on can be tolerated, we have strayed far, very far. Very far, indeed. But the consolation I hold to, dear Miss Wakefield, is that this is not true of all of us. No, not all. Pray do not think so.'

'Isn't Mrs. Allenby wild?' giggled Ellen Nichol, who might fairly be said to voice the sentiments of the third party. 'She simply can't bear being out of it — poor thing! All the same the "Affiliateds" *are* rather going it. Did you hear they had actually asked Eudora Cox to be a fortune-teller? I know they did because she asked me if I'd lend her my red silk scarf for her hair. But Mr. McKenzie put his foot down on that. Have you heard about the guessing contest? Mrs. Allenby says it's only a new and worse form of gambling. She expects baccarat next! . . . just what is baccarat, Miss Wakefield? . . .'

It is to be feared that Cynthia thoroughly enjoyed herself.

'I told Euan you would like it,' said Janet, much pleased, 'and a bit of excitement will do no harm after all your studies. You are too sensible a lass to take harm from new notions. And from what I'm hearing, there's to be new notions in plenty.'

'I'll try to keep an open mind,' promised Cynthia demurely. 'And it's all new to me. Tell me — why do they have separate programme committees, one for each day?'

Janet looked surprised at this. 'To see who'll be getting the best programme, what else?' said she. 'Mrs. Caldicott has the first night and Mrs. Sowerby the second. 'Twill be fair exciting!'

'Rivals?' exclaimed Cynthia, delighted. 'What a nice idea! Who's leading?'

But Janet would not commit herself in this. There were those that thought Mrs. Caldicott's programme would be the more refined, but Mrs. Sowerby had been heard to drop mysterious hints of unexpected novelties. There were rumours of a stage arranged as a tropical jungle with potted ferns and rubber plants and the imitation palms from Crawford's new ice-cream parlour. No one knew for certain, but Janet understood that a new-fangled dance would be given — a Fairy Frolic, so it was called, with Gilda Fenwell as the principal fairy. Certainly Mrs. Ellis's infant class were being trained in secret and Andrew had been asked to make the toadstools for a fairy ring. 'That's how I came to know,' said Janet. 'For they're keeping it terrible quiet.'

'It sounds very daring,' said Cynthia.

'Aye. I doubt if Mrs. Caldicott will be like to equal it.'

'Has any one seen Gilda's dancing?' asked Cynthia, struck with sudden doubt. 'I once saw a Fairy Ballet — but it could hardly be that one. Did Mrs. Sowerby call it a "ballet"?' she asked.

Janet was sure the word was 'frolic' not 'ballet.' As for any one having actually seen the dance, she did not know

whether they had or not. But no doubt it was a simple thing, what with the infant class and the toadstools and all. Certainly it was not one of those Spanish 'fandangle' things. 'Classical' was what Mrs. Sowerby had said it was. Janet remembered distinctly hearing her say, 'These classical dances are really only a very primitive form of hygienic exercise.'

"'Primitive' is good!" laughed Cynthia. "If it's anything like the ballet I saw—! well, Mrs. Allenby would certainly call it a Trend."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE opening day of the Festival dawned through a mist of rain, but by ten o'clock the last drop had fallen and the clouds were lifting hopefully. Kathrine watched the wet sills of the windows begin to glitter with the returning sun.

'It is going to be dry after all,' said Lucia. 'Gilda will be able to wear her thin slippers.'

'She would wear them, anyway,' said Kathrine listlessly. 'Mother, if I finish hemming this edge will you be able to manage? I promised to be down at the rink by half-past ten.'

'Give it to me now. I am just ready for it,' said Lucia. 'This is the last of the wing pieces and everything else is ready.'

'What is Gilda going to wear underneath the tulle, Mother? Isn't her silk slip too narrow?'

'Oh, Mrs. Graham is giving her a slip. Gilda says it is just right. Very full and soft. It is one of Amy's, I suppose. Of course, Mrs. Graham knew that the tulle would need something — and there is no need to look like that, Kathrine. It is not Gilda she is giving the dress to. It is part of her contribution to the Festival. If Gilda does the dancing, it is only fair that the costume should be provided. I'm sure the poor child has worked hard enough. . . . There she is, practising again!'

From above their heads came the faint sound of some one whistling. The air was the measure of a dance, gay, enticing. Kathrine laid down the long breadth of tulle which she had been hemming and crossed to the window. Without knowing why, she sighed. Then, quickly, she tried to turn the sigh into a yawn.

'I'm lazy,' she said. 'I don't want to go down to the rink,

or to decorate that flower booth, or to be a Turkish lady in black and red sateen. I don't want to do anything or be any one.'

'You need a tonic,' said Lucia uneasily.

Kathrine laughed.

'When is Gilda going to rehearse with the children?' she asked.

'She isn't going to rehearse at all. Mrs. Ellis has the children and is responsible for them. All they do is to dance in, form a ring, and sit on the toadstools swaying to the music while Gilda dances.'

'It is a pretty air,' said Kathrine. 'I wonder how Gilda manages to dance and whistle at the same time? . . . Tell her to pick up Mrs. Graham's flowers, will you? I am to call in for the Rectory flowers as I pass.'

'I'll tell her. But if you really feel tired, why not send some of the children for the flowers?'

'Oh — it's not real tiredness — just a kind of "heavy, heavy hangs over thy head" — what Euan's mother would call a "merman." Something is going to happen at this Festival. I feel it in my bones.'

'I wish you wouldn't, Kathy! I'm nervous enough as it is. To think of Gilda —'

'But I'm not thinking of Gilda,' interrupted Kathrine with a little laugh. 'I'm thinking of me. That's the kind of girl I am . . . Well, I'm off.'

Carrying her hat in her hand, Kathrine stepped out into the rain-washed air. Its freshness was pleasant against her forehead, the drops which shook themselves from the trees fell like cool fingers upon her skin. Some of the heaviness dropped away. Perhaps she did need a tonic . . . perhaps it was only physical, this dragging weight? . . . If not . . . what could it be? . . . Surely not a selfish disappointment in Garry's decision about his uncle's offer? . . . That would have been both silly and short-sighted. She had always

expected that Garry would finish his college course before thinking of marriage. She had been quite willing to wait. Waiting had seemed easy. It would still seem easy if — if nothing else had changed. But something had changed. The impossible had become possible. Garry could marry her to-morrow if he wanted to . . .

Kathrine held up her face to the cool fingers of the falling drops — 'If he wanted to' — the whole sting lay there . . . for Garry hadn't seemed to want to . . . why not face the fact?

'It's because he is more practical than I am,' Kathrine told herself firmly. 'He sees the absurdities of a married man at college. He is quite right to want to wait.'

'Of course he is right,' replied her inward arguer briskly. 'But you don't want him to be right, do you? You don't want him to be wise or far-sighted or logical. You want him to be unreasonable and determined and utterly foolish. You want him to want to marry you at once, this instant — and if he wanted that, it wouldn't matter at all if you had to wait for years and years . . . it isn't the waiting you care about . . .'

'He is a man,' she answered. 'And I am a woman. The whole difference is there. He sees things differently. Men are like that.'

'Not all men and not always,' insinuated the arguer unkindly.

'Yes, all men and always!' Kathrine was so very fierce about it that she carried the point — for the moment.

As she turned into the Rectory street, her heart lifted happily. Garry had been so thoughtful about the flowers. He had promised to have them all ready and to go down with her to the rink. He was to be waiting at the Rectory gate.

But there was no one at the Rectory gate. She must be early. She had walked too fast. Suddenly she felt both hot

and shy as if in being early she had offended against herself. The church door was invitingly open. She would slip in there until he came.

With a quick look around to make sure that no one was watching, she stepped into its cool shadow. It was restful there. Like another world. Coming in from the bright morning, one could see only a pleasant colour-barred dimness. The girl wandered up the empty aisle. She felt strange in this alien church, but happier. When she and Garry were married, some church like this would be their united care. She would love it as he did. She loved it already. . . . How strangely the altar gleamed in the dim light! . . .

She had reached the end of the aisle when a faint sound stopped her. Her light step had made no noise, nor could she see any one . . . and yet that sound, so brief, so human, brought her heart fluttering into her throat.

The church was not empty as she had thought. Startled, she hesitated for just a moment and in that moment a shadow moved. Some one was kneeling before the altar. Some one who thought himself alone . . . some one in trouble . . .

Kathrine, feeling all the tingling shame of an intruder, turned to go. But, even as she turned, the sound came again. The long shadow of a breeze-tossed branch outside the window shifted, and she saw the figure upon the altar steps quite plainly. It was Garry.

The girl felt all the strength die out of her. Her knees weakened so that she saved herself from falling only by sinking into the nearest pew. For one infinite moment, the world swam far away.

'I mustn't faint. I have never fainted!' she found herself muttering, and, with the motion of her lips, the world swam back. But it was a different world. One startled glance had changed it.

The revelation had been instantaneous as all real revela-

tion is. Lightning had flashed into the dark place. Kathrine had never heard of the subconscious mind. But what she knew now, she knew completely and felt that she had always known.

Her wonderful world had been illusion only . . . and the illusion was gone . . . that look of agony and struggle! — that was the look which had been behind Garry's troubled, absent eyes while they had walked and talked . . . struggle and agony . . . because he did not love her . . . because he knew it . . . because he could not speak . . .

And she had never guessed!

Or had she? Kathrine closed her eyes to shut out a sudden vision. But the dim altar with its flecks of light, its still serenity, its air of timeless waiting, slipped softly through her shut lids, flowed through her brain and beat upon her heart . . . Was it this, then, that Garry loved? Was it the loss of this which, realized too late, had set that look upon his face? . . . What else? Hadn't she always known? And been afraid? What was her hold against that deeper claim — that tireless, patient thing that, asking nothing, waited?

With infinite caution she rose and stole back down the aisle.

Outside in the sunlight she drew a hand across her eyes . . . and noted, dully, that the hand was shaking. She laughed a little and the laugh shook too . . . the sunshine nauseated her . . . and all because she had seen Garry praying in church . . . as no doubt he often did . . . that was all!

But it wasn't all. It wasn't even part. It was nothing. The real thing was that she had seen his face . . .

'Are you waiting for a laggard?' asked the Rector's cheerful voice behind her. 'Won't you come in and put up with my company until he comes? The boy is around somewhere, I think.'

'Garry is in the church.' Kathrine's tone was strange even to her own ears.

'Ah — then there is no hurry. Come in. You look — tired.'

Kathrine went through the gate he held open for her. She was glad to be able to walk steadily. Mr. Dwight led her to his special corner by the red wall, talking of the weather and of the Festival and of the weather again until he saw her face regain its usual clear pallor. Then:

'What startled you?' he asked quietly.

The girl made no attempt either to answer or to evade the question. There seemed no use in denying that she had been startled.

'Is Garry responsible?' asked the Rector.

'I went in,' said Kathrine vaguely. 'I don't think I can explain.'

A silence fell between them.

'Garry means a great deal to me,' said the Rector at last. Kathrine made an effort.

'Garry is not to blame,' she said. 'I saw him. He didn't know I was there.' Hot colour flooded her cheek. 'I feel like a spy.'

'You were not a spy,' said the Rector. 'And perhaps you saw only what it was your right to see. Do not be afraid that I shall question you. But I have seen for some time that the boy is at odds with life. Now you have seen it, too. For the rest we can only wait.'

The ghost of a smile flitted over Kathrine's face. 'That is what I have been doing,' she said. 'I have been waiting. I have been deliberately blinding myself. For I knew that Garry had changed. Or rather, that he had gone back to what he used to be. I — our engagement — was an interval, I suppose.'

'I cannot blame your bitterness,' said the Rector gravely.

'I do not mean to be bitter. If I hadn't been blinded, I might have seen the Church has always been the vital thing to Garry. Indeed, I think that I did see it. Only I believed

I was going to have a place, too.' Tears which had welled up into her hurt and widened eyes fell unchecked upon her cheeks.

The Rector looked away. He had never become used to women's tears, though he had seen many of them. Besides, he was deeply troubled. He had hoped that, having seen so much, Kathrine might have seen more — might, in fact, have seen everything. But it appeared that the harder disillusionment was still before her.

'Garry should speak,' said the Rector sternly. 'It is your right to know — to be told the exact truth. I cannot think the boy a coward.'

'Nor I,' simply. 'And he will speak, I am sure. Perhaps he thought that I would see for myself. I did see that he was struggling against something. But I tried not to know, not to admit what it was.'

'And now — you are sure of what it is?' His delicacy would dare no more.

'Quite sure,' in a tired tone. 'What else could there be? But if he had told me it might have been easier. I have seemed to try to keep what was never really mine. The truth would have spared me that.'

The Rector rose abruptly. 'The truth,' he said, 'never spares any one. It makes no concessions. But you, I think,' with a faint smile — 'make few concessions either. I am sorry that this has happened, very sorry. Garry would have been safe with you, if —' He caught himself up, but not in time.

'If he had loved me?' finished Kathrine . . . 'Yes, it comes to that, of course . . . you won't mind if I go now? I must think of what may be best to do.'

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE remainder of that day was not very clear to Kathrine. During the morning she worked hard. Under her feverish activity the flower booth emerged triumphant from chaos into beauty. The pause before the great moment of opening, when Blencarrow's ringing bugle call (again credit Mrs. Sowerby) should announce the Grand March, found her physically tired. But the tumult in her mind refused to quiet. Pleading still unfinished work she escaped a personal part in the march and, standing aside, perceived its splendours only with abstracted eyes. Depending upon her, we miss much of a spectacle unique in Blencarrow annals. China and Japan, Russia, Italy, Holland, Turkey, America, the British Isles, France, India, and Switzerland, all the nations of the earth parading around Morrison's Rink awoke no thrill at all in Kathrine. For her, the band bursting into a swinging medley of National Anthems (mostly 'Marseillaise') was nothing but a monstrous intrusion. It wouldn't let her think! The laughter around her, all the happy notes of festival, clanging cymbals and tinkling tambourine, beat upon her brain with torturing pressure. The scent of the rink, incense mingled with the smell of damp sawdust on an earthen floor, turned her sick and giddy.

The voice of Mayor Tiddy raised in the opening address sounded far away. For while the larger world swept by her, Kathrine's small world crumbled. Behind the shelter of the flower booth her eyes and ears and every sharpened sense strained to focus themselves upon one person only — a nervously active young man in a suit of light grey tweeds. Only by detaching ourselves entirely from her earthbound soul are we able to attain a truly cosmic outlook and exclaim with Mrs. Sowerby, 'This is stupendous!'

It was, indeed, Mrs. Sowerby's day of days. Triumph was hers all along the line, and triumph, mind you, with decorum and honour. At none of the final arrangements had the party of the second part been able (fairly) to point an accusing finger. The costumes, though wonderfully varied, were modest to a degree. Some licence had been taken to ensure this, especially in the matter of the Turkish ladies, where it had been felt that the harem must not be indicated too clearly. The guessing contest had received official recognition, having been referred to by the Mayor as 'an exercise tending to develop advantageously our young people's faculty of — er — mathematical calculation.' Selling, at all booths, proceeded briskly — the donated groceries, the kitchen and tea aprons, the fresh vegetables, the fancy articles, and even the home cooking were doing well. Only 'Ye Olde Bookshoppe' was somewhat flat, owing probably to 'ye olde' books being too 'olde.' Mrs. Sowerby had feared this, but she felt that the literary tone achieved had been worth the trouble.

The evening's programme under the capable direction of Mrs. Caldicott was a masterpiece of selective excellence — an excellence, it was whispered, which some people might find it difficult to live up to. But at this the programme committee for the second night smiled behind its hand.

All day Kathrine had dreaded the inevitable walk home with Garry. The issue between them must be faced, but she was not ready to face it. Fortunately, fate, relenting at the last moment, spared her the necessity, for Gilda, unaccountably without an escort, walked home with them.

'You don't mind if I trail along, do you?' she asked, her pretty smile just a shade less ready than usual.

Kathrine tried not to show her relief. 'I thought I heard you tell Harold Caldicott that you had promised Con,' she remarked.

'Did I?' innocently. 'And, perhaps, if you had listened,

you might have heard me tell Con I had promised Harold. The truth is' — with a charming pout — 'I didn't want to be bothered with either of them.'

Had Kathrine's eyes been on Garry, she could not have missed the sharp contraction of his face at this. But she was looking at Gilda and Gilda's face showed nothing save faint wistfulness. Gilda, as a matter of fact, was furious, but nobody must guess that. Nobody must dream that she had miscalculated, and that Con, who had been quite attentive all evening, had ended by taking home — his aunt.

Kathrine was grateful. Gilda's soft laugh and ripple of comment would cover her own silence as the darkness would hide her face. Garry need notice nothing, and, once in her own room, neither face nor manner would matter.

She had not expected to sleep that night and yet sleep came almost at once — a heavy sleep from which she woke suddenly with a sense of something settled and done with. The haze of yesterday had cleared. Panic had gathered itself into purpose. How or when, she did not know, but she knew that her hesitation was ended. Garry must be given his freedom. Must, indeed, be forced to take it. Further waiting, compromise of any kind, was intolerable.

'To-night — after the Festival,' she promised herself, and wondered painfully how she had found the power to do what yesterday she had lacked the courage even to think of.

The day dragged by slowly. To the undiscerning nothing occurred to mar the Festival's perfection and at night Gilda was to dance. Kathrine tried to keep her mind on this as much as possible and to simulate something of a sister's natural interest in so important an event. Certainly the preparations for it were exciting enough. The platform ('stage' being a term taboo) was a mere platform no longer. Behind its green curtains skilful hands had transformed it into a tropical jungle, delicately and appropriately lighted

by Japanese lanterns. Green druggets simulated the mossy turf which no doubt carpets these wildernesses. Long creepers of myrtle draped themselves from palm to rubber plant and back again. It was arranged that at intervals the beat of a drum should be heard off stage— platform. Surely the last note in realism! The lights in the rink would be turned low. It was all very daring, and, as Mrs. Sowerby said, so new!

‘It’s very nice for Gilda’s dance,’ said Kathrine, ‘but won’t the rest of the programme feel rather foolish?’

Mrs. Sowerby thought not.

‘A background,’ she said, ‘is a background and should be looked upon as such. For myself I feel that the greenery will set off the kimonos of the “Three Little Maids from School” very effectively, while our more serious numbers, such as “Alone on the Deep,” will be made doubly impressive by the illusion of night and the forest.’

That this dictum was based upon sound psychology, the applause of a delighted audience showed. The only untoward accident took place during the club-swinging exercises of the Fifth Reader class but the resulting casualties, mostly lanterns, were too trivial to mention.

After this followed a short interval. The green curtains were mysteriously drawn and the chairman begged the indulgence of the audience while the stage— platform was prepared for the ‘Frolic of the Fairies’ by Mrs. Ellis’s class assisted by Miss G. Fenwell. Behind the curtains the toadstools were quickly adjusted, some of the rubber plants moved back so that the Principal Fairy might have room to dance, and the necessary effect of moonlight obtained by covering the lanterns with green tissue paper.

Then, quite softly, the orchestra began to play and the curtains were swung back to a general murmur of delight quieted instantly by Mrs. Sowerby’s loud ‘H-ist!’ From either side, from behind banked ferns, the fairies glided in

and every (represented) mother in the audience thrilled and whispered . . . 'There's Susan!' . . . 'There's my Annie!' . . . 'Isn't little Mabel sweet!' — subdued murmurs, voices of unsubduable pride.

The fairies all wore book-muslin, very stiff; white stockings, very long; and anything else which their mothers had thought desirable. Very solemnly, very charmingly, they circled round the fairy ring, pausing now and then to bow shyly to each other and to execute a careful turn on the tips of their tottery toes. Then, as the music slowed, they subsided upon their allotted stools, their flower-wreathed heads swaying gently.

A ripple of appreciative applause drowned the efforts of the orchestra, and when it could be heard again the time of its music had changed. It was not playing a march now, but a new and dancing air, wistful yet gay. The surprised audience quieted itself to listen and, in that pause of listening, the Principal Fairy glimmered through the trees, tiptoed into the open, turned once around as if whirled by some sportive wind, and stood poised — arms outstretched, lips smiling . . . The dance began.

To describe Gilda in the dance of the fairies would be a thankless task. It was not a matter which words can convey, but you may imagine, if you will, a flower in a breeze, a cloud in flight, the poise and dart of some swift-winged bird, the hide-and-seek of graceful, bright-eyed woodland creatures, the soft, slow fluttering of a falling autumn leaf.

All this the dance of the fairies was.

But —

Mrs. Sowerby's horrified eyes had no need of any imagination to tell her that the feet (and legs) of the dancer were bare; that her arms were bare; that one shoulder had not even a shoulder strap to hide its bareness; and that her dress was hardly a dress at all, but merely an arrangement of winglike drapes of tulle, drooping and swirling in fantastic

points and disclosing with every swirl not a proper and substantial petticoat (which might have saved the situation), but a soft and clinging mass of whiteness which looked as if it might (oh, Heaven!) become suddenly as transparent as the wavering tulle!

(That it never exactly did this was, as Mrs. Allenby said, 'Heaven's mercy and no fault of hers!')

The rustle which spread through the watching rink might have been the murmur of the forest straining against a sudden wind. The little wide-eyed fairies forgot to sway upon their toadstool ring, the gay and lilting music grew louder and then lower and then louder again, and the Principal Fairy danced as if there were nothing but dancing in all the fairy world . . .

In the middle of the circling which threw out the winged tulle points like petals of some great white rose, Mrs. Allenby got up and went out. As virtual leader of the party of the second part she could do no less, though she felt that in leaving she might be missing the worst of the performance. The reason why she had not departed before, she explained, was that she had been too overcome to move. She hadn't the strength. Mrs. McCorquodale followed her.

But the rest of Blencarrow sat it out. They were there, were they not, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Ladies' Affiliated Societies? If what they saw was improper, let the Affiliated Societies look to it. Their position, as audience, was unassailable.

The music grew softer now, the fairy's winglike draperies fluttered closer in, her maze of 'magic paces and of waving hands' grew simpler and more simple still, until she scarcely seemed to move, only to float and hover — slowly, very slowly, she glimmered backward through the trees — was gone!

The entranced fairies of the ring, under Mrs. Ellis's frantic urging, stood up, the orchestra broke into a march again,

the curtain shrieked along its metal rod, and the Fairy Frolic was over.

Mrs. Sowerby, sitting frozen in her chair, heard as in a dream an agitated chairman announce the next number on the programme.

We shall have to leave her sitting there, for just at that moment Garry stepped out by a side door and to Kathrine, who saw him go, the hall became suddenly empty. She was not unaware of the sensation which Gilda's dancing had caused, but, beside the realities which were pressing so close, it seemed a surface ripple, too trivial for attention. Garry, alone and at the mercy of his thoughts, was all that mattered just then. She would go to him now and let him know that he was free.

It was a very beautiful night. After the hot rink its freshness was like cool water at the lips. There was no moon, and for a moment Kathrine stood, 'shy before the multitude of the stars.' Breathing deeply she waited, letting the small excitement of Gilda's dance drop away, gathering calm from the serenity of the sky.

Garry must be quite near. He would not have gone home without telling her. In these things he was most punctilious. No girl could have a more dutiful lover. Kathrine felt a twist of grim humour as she supplied the adjective . . . well, that was definitely over.

She walked slowly around to the side door by which he had left the rink. He was not there, nor did he seem to be anywhere in the rink's enclosure. Perhaps he had reëntered the hall. Unwilling to show herself in the light of the entrance doors, she turned back, and there, in the shadow of an angle of the wall near the door leading to the platform, she saw him. He was standing very still. Though his back was to her, she could see the droop of his shoulders, the listless hanging of his hands by his side. It was the attitude of a man who rests after a struggle which he has given up.

Pity for him drowned every other feeling in Kathrine's heart. She moved toward him quickly. Her hand fell lightly on his arm.

It was a feather touch, but under it the listless figure sprang into vibrant life. He wheeled and Kathrine felt herself caught up and kissed as she had only dreamed of kissing — heard the hoarse and broken cry in her startled ear — 'Gilda! Gilda!'

No hours of explanation or confession could have told her more than that one passion-torn word.

But shock is a curious thing . . . now that the truth lay ugly and stark before her, Kathrine did not tremble as she had trembled in the church. Before he had dared to realize his ghastly blunder, she had freed herself and walked away.

CHAPTER TWENTY

PRIDE may go before a fall, but it is not a bad thing to hold to when one is down. Pride and a sense of humour may be bitter things, but their very bitterness is salutary. Kathrine, suddenly and desperately fallen from her high dream of voluntary sacrifice, found their harsh support grateful. In her flash of blinding illumination she had quite seen the element of absurdity in her case. She had thought to be a heroine and she had been merely a fool. There was poison in the thought, but it was very tonic. From this wreck of dreams she must at least retrieve her self-respect.

On the morning after the Festival she told her mother that her engagement to Garry was broken. She told it in Gilda's presence and in such a matter-of-fact way that even that astute young person could not be sure whether the breaking had meant much or little. In any case it seemed wise to eschew condolences.

'I thought something was going to happen,' said Gilda. 'Both you and Garry have been like bears for the past week. Where on earth did you disappear to last night? I couldn't find either of you, though I waited around till nearly every one had gone. I might have had to come home alone only that I ran into your wild man of the woods who condescendingly walked with me to the corner.'

'Con had his aunt with him,' said Lucia, 'so naturally his first duty was to her.'

'I'm not objecting, am I?' Gilda raised her dark golden eyebrows. 'Besides, it is so nice to get to know people's aunts.' Her face dimpled and she laughed. 'This one didn't speak a word the whole way,' she added with relish.

Kathrine threw her a speculative glance. She was not

entirely deceived by the laugh and the dimple. Since yesterday she seemed to be seeing many things more clearly.

'What did you do it for, Gilda?' she asked abruptly.

'Do what?' Gilda, in spite of admirable self-control, changed colour slightly.

'The dance. Did you do it on purpose, or was it a mistake?'

'Oh, that!' shrugging. 'Well, perhaps it did raise their hair more than I intended. It doesn't matter, does it?'

'Not unless you think it does.'

'Hum! You mean they're really squiffy about it?'

'The dance was a charming thing and very well done,' interrupted Lucia. 'I saw nothing but beauty in it.'

'Nor I,' said Kathrine dryly.

'I don't care.' Gilda's tone was mutinous. 'It's simply too deadly here! I had to do something. They asked me, didn't they? If the old tabbies didn't like it they can lump it.'

'They will. But you may find things dull while they're doing it. Mrs. Caldicott is giving a little dance next week.'

'I know — "a little party for Harold,"' mimicked Gilda; 'and you think she'll leave me out?'

'Sure to.'

'The horrid cat! If she does I'll pay her back. I'll make a dead set at her one-and-only.'

'Gilda!' Lucia's distressed tone stopped her. 'I can't permit you to talk like that.'

'All right, Mumsy, I won't. But just watch me snaffle dear Harold.' Blowing a kiss in the general direction of Caldicott's, she danced out of the room.

'She doesn't mean it,' observed Lucia apologetically.

Kathrine, who was putting away the breakfast things, said nothing.

'Gilda never means —' began Lucia, but, happening to catch Kathrine's sceptical smile, she flushed and was silent.

Reserves between mother and daughter are hard to break down. And between Kathrine and Lucia a barrier had grown of late.

'I am very sorry to hear about you and Garry,' Lucia said presently. In spite of herself the words came formally. 'It was you, I suppose, who —' she hesitated.

'Yes, it was I who ended it. As you say, Garry might not have done it; he might have considered it not the act of a gentleman.'

'Neither would it have been.'

'No? The truly gentlemanly thing would have been to marry me while desperately in love with my sister.'

'Kathrine!'

'Didn't you know it?' Kathrine's voice sounded merely surprised. 'I thought you might have known. Mr. Dwight did. He tried to warn me the other day. I must have seemed unbelievably stupid. The fact appears to have been glaringly plain to every one but me.'

'You don't understand, and what you imply is most unfair,' said Lucia, much agitated. 'I may have noticed something, but I hoped it was only a passing fancy. Gilda affects men like that. She can't help it. I don't think she even knows it. And she doesn't care for Garry at all — not in that way.'

'I am quite sure she doesn't, Mother. Gilda doesn't care for anybody in any way — except you, of course,' she added hastily, as she saw the tightening of her mother's face.

Lucia laid down her sewing. Into her eyes had come the strange blank look which Kathrine had grown to dread.

'No,' she said softly. 'You can't have it both ways. If Gilda cares for no one, why should she care for me? And that is justice, too. I hated her, you see.'

'You hated Gilda?' — in wonderment.

Lucia nodded. 'Before she was born I hated her. I would have denied her life if I could. I had come to hate life

so! To pass it on seemed a horrible thing . . . horror . . . all horror —'

'Mother, dear, don't! All that part is gone. It will never come again. Try to forget.'

Lucia shook her head. 'I mustn't forget,' she said wisely; 'forgetting is dangerous. I must watch. I must take care of Gilda. I have to give her everything because I denied her so much. I have no right to look for any return. I don't. But Gilda must be happy.'

With the deep conviction of these last words Lucia's strained gaze relaxed. Her manner became natural again. 'Perhaps I am foolish,' she added in her usual tone.

Kathrine, who had been unpleasantly startled, tried to be usual also.

'I think you are, rather,' she said. 'It's morbid to blame Gilda on your own feelings before she was born, or afterward either. And when I said that she doesn't love any one, I meant that she hasn't grown up yet. Gilda can love. She loves herself at present as a child does — and that is the trouble. As for what has happened between Garry and me — I don't blame her. Gilda in herself couldn't have made it happen. The mistake lay farther back. Besides, I have escaped the worst. I might have married — not knowing!'

Lucia resumed her work with a heavy sigh. Her unwonted burst of feeling had tired her.

'Yes, you have escaped that,' she repeated. 'And now, what had we better do?'

'Nothing at all,' said Kathrine firmly. 'Somebody will do it for us — probably Mrs. Binns. I am going down to the rink now to help them tidy the place up. My departure last night was notably abrupt. As I have to face things, I may as well begin.'

'You know best, dear. And you have all the Fenwell pride. That helps. At least it helps when one is young.'

'Oh, everything is easy when one is young,' said Kathrine flippantly. 'Too bad one has to grow old to know it!'

'Is she gone?' Gilda's shining head peeped cautiously in from the stair door and Gilda's graceful person followed, seeing that the way was clear.

'Isn't this the most provoking thing that could possibly have happened?' she exclaimed crossly, flinging herself on a footstool beside Lucia's chair. 'Garry is really hopeless — a perfect fool!'

'What did happen?' asked Lucia quietly.

'I don't know. Only he must have muffed things badly. I only smiled at him when I was dancing. I saw he was — well, rather worked up. So I didn't look at him after that. And I did not go out after the dance as I had said I might. Really, Mother, it's not my fault.'

'You did not discourage him in the beginning as you might have done, Gilda.'

'I didn't do anything either way. I could hardly help his looking at me. And this is what I get for being decent and polite. He is the most selfish thing! I suppose it never occurred to him that if Kathy got huffy and broke away, every one would say I was to blame — pig!'

'Kathrine will say nothing about it.'

'She won't need to,' gloomily. 'Blencarrow is full of clairvoyants, and Garry is as transparent as a pane of glass. Mother, I've simply got to get out of this place.'

'It isn't possible, Gilda.'

'But I'm not happy here. And surely I have a right to be happy! I was bored at Cousin Elizabeth's. But here I'm worse than bored. Everybody watching . . . and that fishy Harold Caldicott . . . and all those silly other boys . . . and now Garry making endless trouble . . . how can I have a good time?'

'Euan Cameron is not a silly boy.'

'He's silly enough to be absolutely soppy over Kathy.'

Not the way Garry was—the real thing. Besides, he'd drive me mad in a week.'

'There is Con de Beck. I thought you might like him.'

'Why?' curiously.

'I don't know. Perhaps because I like him. There is something so safe about Con.'

Gilda wriggled uneasily on her stool. 'Safe?' she echoed. 'That's just the word for him. I hate safe people. I hate a man who won't take a risk. It's so — so cowardly.'

Lucia smiled. 'I've never heard Con called a coward exactly. And as for taking risks — his life is full of risks, I fancy. But if you mean that he hasn't come to see us very often of late — I've noticed that, too.'

'Why doesn't he come, Mother?'

'I don't know. He and Kathy used to be a great deal together. But since her engagement, no doubt he has felt his company superfluous.'

'Kathy!' exclaimed Gilda in a startled voice. 'You don't mean that she — that he — oh, but that's utter nonsense!'

Her face, as she sat, was turned away, but Lucia saw with surprise that a faint colour had flushed the back of her neck. To blush involuntarily and unseen was a rare thing for Gilda.

'One never knows,' said Lucia. 'Con is a strange boy.'

'He isn't Kathy's style,' declared Gilda. 'She never looks at him.'

'She has been looking at Garry.'

'And so she should,' said Gilda virtuously. 'Surely, she can't really mean to throw him over for a little thing like last night?'

'I am afraid she does. What was the "little thing"?'

Gilda, who had been resting her head against Lucia's knee, sprang up.

'I've told you I don't know,' she said, 'but I'm going to find out! — Mother, does Con de Beck stay with his aunt all summer?'

'Not always. His stays are very uncertain. He may leave at any time. Why?'

'Oh, nothing!' Gilda was elaborately careless, but Lucia's arrested attention did not miss the look of hardening resolution in her eyes.

'You can't play with Con, Gilda,' she warned timidly. But Gilda only laughed and kissed her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IF Gilda had been surprised by the unbroken silence of Miss Martha Tucker during their homeward walk after the Festival, Con, her nephew, was not. He knew these long silences of his aunt's and had ceased to find them surprising. Her explanation, given once for all, had been that she couldn't talk and think at the same time and that she found it necessary to think occasionally. If her thinking 'came on' at embarrassing moments, it was never Miss Tucker who was embarrassed. She was not sufficiently self-conscious for that. Like many people who are much alone, she was beautifully heedless of the expected thing.

On the evening in question, Miss Tucker's thought spell lasted even longer than usual. Not until they had reached home did she show the slightest disposition to resume the function of speech. And, when she did, the effect was oddly as if she had been talking all the time.

'If she were not so pretty, you never could have thought of her,' said Miss Tucker. It was an appropriate answer to all the things Con might have said, but hadn't. Con made no pretence of misunderstanding.

'Perhaps not,' he said frankly. 'But she is pretty — very, very pretty. More than that. She's lovely.'

'And selfish.'

'Undoubtedly selfish.'

'And wild.'

'Yes. She is beating her wings against Blencarrow already.'

'And that,' said Miss Tucker, 'is what you like in her best of all.'

'I suppose it is, Auntie.'

Miss Tucker untied her bonnet and unpinned her black

lace scarf. She removed her black kid gloves, blew in them to restore their smoothness, and laid them gently aside.

‘What are you going to do about it?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know. Can we sit on the porch for a while? Or will the dew affect your knee?’

Miss Tucker had a knee which several things affected. Fortunately, these affections never interfered with anything which Miss Tucker really wished to do, and to-night she wished to sit on the porch. Therefore the knee was accommodating and did not mind either the lateness of the hour or the dew. Time never bothered either aunt or nephew much. They made their own times and seasons.

‘I didn’t tell you about it because I wasn’t sure,’ said Con, ‘or perhaps I was sure and didn’t want to be.’

Miss Tucker nodded. ‘Tell me now,’ said she.

Con clasped his arms around his bunched-up knees and stared into the night. ‘I know you are surprised,’ he said, ‘but perhaps you aren’t as surprised as I was. You know I have always thought that the kind of woman I should want to marry when the time came would be — not at all like Gilda. The woman I seemed to see when I thought of it was more like — well, more like my mother. I don’t remember my mother very well, but there is a sense of some one very sweet and gentle and quiet. I used to think that perhaps Mrs. Fenwell was something like Mother. Is she?’

Miss Tucker did not answer for a moment. Then: ‘They were both unhappy in their marriage,’ she said.

‘Yes, I guessed that.’

Miss Tucker, who had good eyes, did not miss the way Con’s strong hand clenched upon his knee.

‘You needn’t feel murderous,’ she said. ‘It wasn’t your father’s fault. At least it wasn’t any fault that he could help. Your mother was my only sister and I adored her. She was all that your memory tells you — gentle and very sweet. But she could not make your father happy.’

'What!'

'And you are very like your father,' finished Miss Tucker serenely.

'I don't know how they happened to make their mistake,' she went on. 'Does any one understand these things? It was like mating an eagle with a caged canary. I loved the canary — but I was sorry for the eagle, too.'

The gentle rocking of her chair filled the pause that followed.

'And you say I am like him?'

'Very much.'

'But I have been happy with you.'

'Yes. Do you notice that you use the past tense?'

'I did not mean to. I could be happy with you forever.'

Miss Tucker rocked without comment.

'Oh — it's damnable!' burst out Con. 'I know she is selfish and cold and fickle. I don't like her at all, Aunt.'

'No, you love her; it isn't the same thing. You would love her if she were twice as selfish and thrice as cold. Because, you see, coldness and selfishness are only bits of her. They go to her making, but they are not she. And I'm very doubtful about the coldness, Con.'

'She cares for no one. No one but herself.'

'Then why call her fickle? If she owes no allegiance, she is free of that charge, anyway.'

'Do you like her, Aunt?'

'No. She is not my kind. But she may be yours. I think — perhaps she is.'

'You mean I'm like that?'

'I mean you are not like that. In some curious way you may complement each other.'

'I have thought that' — reluctantly — 'and I have a feeling, almost an instinct, that she knows it too. And yet we both rebel. I don't understand it, but from the first moment it seemed to be a struggle between us. And I know one thing. If I give in to her, I'm done.'

'You are not going to give in to her.'

'To-night I almost did.'

'The dance. Yes, that was clever of her.' Miss Tucker smiled. 'She took a certain risk, too. I rather like her for that. But you are on your guard now. Your only chance is to hold out. It isn't a slave that young person is looking for, it's a master.'

'Do women really want masters?' sceptically.

'Not women, but some women. Most of us want something much harder to come by, a mate. One who is neither master nor slave. That's why so many women are unhappy. The pain of evolution, I suppose. But your Gilda is simpler. Her mate must be her master also.'

'Simple! She is as complex as Mother Eve. Besides, you have hardly seen her. How can you possibly tell?'

'Dear boy, you forget there are other ways of knowing besides long observation. I have seen her aura.'

'Oh, Aunt!' Con's boyish laugh rang out.

'I don't mind your laughing, dear. But be sure that I am right. Your Gilda's complexities are all upon the surface. Eve, to whom you liken her, was a very primitive person.'

'Well — tell me about Gilda's aura.'

'No. You know I do not care to talk of these things. But she was much disturbed to-night, Con. The mirror of her soul is clouded.'

'You're uncanny, Aunt. If you had lived a few hundred years ago, they would have burned you as a witch.'

'Perhaps they did,' placidly. 'I have not yet attained to cosmic memory.'

'Thank Heaven for that!' declared Con — 'but there is always to-morrow. In fact it's to-morrow now. I think you ought to be in bed.' Picking her up, chair and all, he carried her into the lamplit room.

'All the same,' he added ruefully as he kissed her good-night, 'I feel distinctly spoofy myself. As if I were all mixed

up with something which will get a strangle-hold if I don't look out. What is your best and last advice?'

'Wait,' said Miss Tucker briefly.

'I'll have to run away, then. I think I'll take a few days off in the swamp . . . waiting isn't easy, Aunt.'

'Take a good basket,' said Miss Tucker cheerfully. 'I thought you might be going soon. There's plenty in the pantry . . .'

So it happened that Gilda, going down at dusk next evening to post a letter, looked in vain for a half-expected meeting at some shadowy corner. It was true that no appointment had been made, but these things often happen accidentally. There had been indications in Con last night which had led Gilda to expect such an accident. He knew of her habit of posting letters at this hour. Once before he had met and strolled with her. But to-night, though she sauntered very slowly, she met no one (who mattered) in the dusk-filled streets.

It hadn't been a good day at all. First had come Katharine's inconsiderate haste in the breaking of her engagement. Gilda had been compelled to stay in the house practically all day for fear of a premature interview with Garry. She was not at all anxious to meet Garry. She felt sure that he would be in a state of mind, remorse probably, and all kinds of things. Besides, she hadn't quite decided yet what to do with Garry. A great deal depended on — on other things. An accidental stroll with Con might have made these things clearer. And now — no Con!

Could anything have been more maddening? In the shadow of the half-lit streets a disappointed girl might safely bite her lip and stamp her foot. Gilda did both.

'He is afraid,' said Gilda to herself with a hot, sobbing breath. 'He is a big, *big* coward.' The angry lump in her throat almost choked her. For she wasn't at all sure that

Con was afraid. Nor could she find out. The destined victim, having retired behind the invulnerable barricade of absence, all she could do was to rage and wait. And Gilda was tired of waiting.

Nor were the annoyances of the night yet over, for at the corner of Clarges Street she met, not Con, but Garry. He had come up to her and walked beside her without asking permission. Well, there was no hope now of seeing Con to-night, and Garry had to be faced sometime.

‘Are you going down to the house?’ she asked politely.

‘No, I have no longer any right to go there.’ Gilda was relieved that he spoke so quietly. ‘Kathrine told you what happened last night?’

Gilda considered. Kathrine had not told her. But here was a fate-sent opportunity of finding out.

‘I can’t see how you could have been so foolish,’ she said judicially.

‘Foolish!’ slowly. ‘I was mad, I think. For the moment I had forgotten that there was any one in the world but you. When she touched me on the arm —’

‘You thought it was I?’ Gilda was much enlightened.

‘Hadn’t she told you?’ quickly.

‘She told Mother that the engagement was broken. But we thought it might have been just a quarrel.’

‘Kathrine doesn’t quarrel . . . Oh, Gilda, if it only had been that! If it could only have happened in some other way . . . but to have it flung at her like that . . . Kathy, of all people! . . . I wish I had died first.’

‘Very proper.’ Gilda’s tone was cold. ‘But I don’t understand yet. She touched you on the arm — and what?’

‘I can’t tell you if she hasn’t.’

‘You speak as if you had insulted her.’

‘I did.’

‘It insults my sister, then, to be mistaken for me?’

But Garry was too broken for quibbles. ‘Don’t twist

things, Gilda,' he said. 'To mistake the woman you are to marry for any one else in the world is an insult . . . and to do what I did . . . oh, it was hideous! Beyond forgiveness.'

'It was frightfully stupid,' said Gilda. 'Besides, you had no right. I may have promised to run out for a few moments after the dance . . . just to cool off . . . but that didn't give you any right to — to anything.'

'Don't let us pretend, Gilda. I know I had no right. I tell you I was mad. But you knew, you must have guessed, how it was with me.'

'I thought you had some common sense. I knew you didn't care for Kathy properly. And I knew she would be sure to find it out. But you need not have made this horrid muddle.'

'That's not what I mean, Gilda. You know more than that.'

'I don't. And I think you have treated Kathy abominably.'

'There is no word bad enough for the way I have treated Kathy. I am not likely to forgive myself. There is no excuse or palliation. But there is a reason, and you know what the reason is.'

This time Gilda did not deny it. Instead: 'Are you going to stay on here?' she asked abruptly.

'I am going away. As soon as I can. There is business in England which I can attend to for my uncle — a legacy which he is making over to me. I'll never forget how decent Uncle's been.'

'England,' said Gilda thoughtfully. 'That's not a bad idea. And what then?'

'I don't know. I may enter a college there for a time. I daren't think ahead. I've lost all confidence in myself. But Uncle has tried to make me see that one mistake, however serious, should not be allowed to wreck a life — two lives, Gilda. It will be a hard time for us both. But perhaps if we

fight through, we shall have earned some right to happiness. And we — you especially — are so young. Gilda, you'll wait, won't you? Till I can come back honourably? When I've proved that I know myself at last? . . . you'll let me say then what you would hate me for saying now?'

It was fortunate that there was so little light. Otherwise the pure surprise of Gilda's face might have given her humbled lover the shock of his life. It was, indeed, difficult for her to keep back amused dimples . . . Wait? She, Gilda, to wait patiently in Blencarrow until such time as her absent knight might return to offer honourably what was already, not so honourably, hers to do what she liked with? The idea was amusing. But there was no need to show this too openly. Enough harm had been done by precipitancy. One never knows. A friend in England might be very useful.

Thought is swift, and Gilda's thoughts were particularly agile. Her hesitancy had lasted only a moment. Her voice came low and charged with feeling.

'We must not talk of that, now,' she said.

'But you will —'

'No, I will not even think of it' — gently — 'and, Garry, no one must guess — for Kathy's sake.'

She let him kiss her hand.

They were at the gate now. In the space between the lilac bushes he could see her face only dimly. And to him it seemed the face of a very young angel.

'Gilda! Gilda!' he breathed. Then, unable to trust himself, he hurried away.

Gilda turned slowly toward the house, and in doing so almost ran into Cynthia Wakefield, who was coming away from it. That Cynthia had seen the parting was almost certain. Nor had Gilda had time to erase the little smile of amusement which still played around her lips.

'You little imp!' said Cynthia, with entire conviction.

Gilda laughed adorably.

'They are so silly,' confided she, 'and we're all little imps, don't you think? . . . How is Euan? . . . If you tell him of this affecting scene, he will know that Kathy isn't engaged any more . . . but you won't tell him . . . will you? . . . I thought not,' she laughed, again, and with a graceful wave of her hand disappeared up the walk.

'The little devil!' said Cynthia. The substitution of the stronger word seemed to relieve her feelings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

DIRECTLY after the Festival the weather changed and became very sultry and oppressive. Every night the sullen sky promised the relief of rain, but the rain delayed and the heat grew greater. MacIvor's Front Step decided that the town was in for a regular spell of weather. Crawford's ice-cream parlour more than justified its existence and the dripping wagon of the iceman was never without its trail of perspiring urchins hopeful of a 'chunk of ice, please, mister!' when the wagon stopped.

The heat, besides being the principal topic of conversation, was held responsible for everything.

'It certainly does take the starch out,' complained Cynthia, languidly at ease in the Cameron hammock. 'My spine has wilted and presently my brain will melt.'

She was not at all sorry to have a scapegoat for her own inertia during the closing days of her stay with the Camerons. It saved her the labour of pretending to be sprightly. And Cynthia had never felt less sprightly in her life. Her experiment had ended disastrously and she had found the facing of the fact acutely unpleasant. 'Though, thank Heaven, Maddy is too decent to say, "I told you so,"' she murmured. 'If she did, I'd hate her!'

To Janet's warm invitation to prolong her visit, she pleaded promises to other friends — 'though I'd much rather stay here, you know that,' she added.

Janet, who did know, nodded. She would miss Cynthia, but she approved the wisdom of her going. With Kathrine Fenwell's affair 'all every whichways,' nothing could be done at present. A young man thoroughly occupied with one girl has small attention to spare for another. And Euan

was nothing if not thorough. 'You'll be coming down in the next holidays, at any rate,' she said, hopefully.

'Perhaps,' said Cynthia.

She was wondering, as she lay in the hammock, what Janet would say when she heard the news which Gilda had tossed her beside the gate on the night before. Unless Cynthia told her, she might not hear it for some time. And Gilda had been quite sure that she would not tell.

The sting of the 'Imp's' assurance rankled. The memory of her smile as she said, 'But you won't tell him, will you?' made Cynthia's cheeks flush angrily. For of course she intended to tell Euan at the first opportunity, only the opportunity didn't seem to come . . . it was so hot! Besides, how could she be sure that Gilda had spoken the truth? A little liar like that! Why upset Euan unnecessarily? Why put the idea of a jilted and disconsolate Kathrine into his head — if it weren't there already. Perhaps it was there — Euan was looking very dour.

'You are dour, Euan,' she told him, 'but I forgive you, since it gives me the thrill of expressing myself in a foreign language.'

'Sorry!' murmured Euan; 'an incident of temperament.'

'Or temperature,' said Cynthia; 'why not come back to the lake with me?'

'Can't,' said Euan. 'I'm worried, Cynthy.'

'I've noticed that.'

'Have you noticed anything else?'

'Maybe. But nothing that looks like my business exactly.'

'Then you have noticed — well, I suppose I'm the last to see things, as usual. And even now I'm anything but sure . . . a girl like Kathy! It doesn't seem possible. Garry *couldn't*.'

'Your mother,' mused Cynthia, 'says he is a philanderer.'

'He isn't.' Euan's tone was truculent.

Cynthia laid down her book. (She would tell him now.)

'I think you are right,' she began. 'The young man is too sincere if anything.'

'You don't think that he really is —'

'I do think that he really is. Love is a trap. It springs when you least expect it. Your Garry played with it — and got caught. Though in his case I think it's less love than infatuation. He is crazy about the little girl with the red hair.'

'Is it red?' asked Euan absently. Then, more emphatically, 'I don't believe it.'

'Well, if you're colour blind —'

'I don't mean that. I mean I don't believe it of Garry. He's not — that kind.'

Cynthia could hear the snap of a branch he held in his hand. (How could she tell him when he felt like that?)

'If swearing will help you, don't mind me,' she urged. 'A bad word is better than blood pressure.'

'You think he'd dare to marry Kathy — if he feels like that?' in a muffled voice.

Now was the time to tell him — to explain that all question of the marriage was over. Only somehow Cynthia didn't do it. Gilda might have been lying.

'He might lack the courage not to,' she said cautiously. 'It is much easier to be a martyr than to be thought a cad.'

Euan sprang up. 'Martyr!' he exclaimed. 'Martyr — to marry Kathy! Is everybody crazy?'

He was certainly highly excited. Surely it would be unwise to tell him in a state like that? Perhaps, with tact, she could break it to him gently. Suggest something, and let him guess the rest —

'Crazy?' she said doubtfully. 'Well, perhaps your Garry is — for the time being. You ought to be feeling sorry for him instead of risking apoplexy from repressed rage. It's so babyish to pretend that a man may never mistake his feel-

ings. Emotions are the very devil! And you told me, didn't you, that Garry was ill when this engagement happened?' 'What has that to do with it?'

'Dear infant, don't you know that men always fall in love with their nurses and recover their health and their hearts at the same time? Nurses expect it. They never turn a hair.'

'That's horrible!'

'Nature is a shocking old thing — no proper bringing-up.'

Euan drew a long breath.

'You must be wrong,' said he. 'We are both wrong. Things like this can't happen!'

A riot of children hurried past the garden gate. Then peace settled back.

'You mean they can't happen — in Blencarrow,' said Cynthia. And she laughed.

But when Janet came out half an hour later with lemonade and cookies, Euan was still in ignorance of Kathrine's broken engagement.

Next morning Cynthia strolled into the wagon shop for a last word with Andrew. 'My train goes at two,' she told him, 'and Mrs. Cameron is putting on her bonnet.'

'The house will be missing you,' said Andrew. 'And the shop, too. Those will be pleasant cracks we've had in this place.'

'Yes,' said Cynthia listlessly. 'Mr. Cameron, do you think God has any sense of humour?'

'Why for no?' Andrew spun the wheel tentatively and applied a bit of axle grease. 'Would He be giving His creatures what He hasn't got Himself? . . . I've often thought that the Almighty must be fair amused whiles,' he added thoughtfully.

Cynthia brightened. 'I'm glad you think that,' she said. 'I'd like to think He is amused with me to-day.'

Andrew's blue eyes twinkled. But he asked no questions.

'I thought I was rather a fine person,' went on Cynthia, 'but I find I'm just like — like somebody else.'

'Aye. There'll be a strong family resemblance between the most of us,' agreed Andrew.

'Kathrine Fenwell's engagement is broken,' said Cynthia. 'I knew it the night before last and I haven't told Euan.' Andrew spun his wheel.

'For why would you be telling him?' he asked mildly.

'Because that Gilda-one said I wouldn't.'

'A prickly lass,' said Andrew gravely. 'I misdoubt maybe you'd angered her —'

'I called her an imp. And she is an imp. But she said I wouldn't tell him, and — I didn't. I don't see how I can get by that.'

'Tis a fair poser,' agreed Andrew. 'But,' with another blue twinkle, 'there'll be still a wee while before the train.'

Cynthia shook her head.

'No, I can't do it now,' she said; 'I've had my chance. I'm not a noble person, and that's the end of it.'

The wagon-maker spun the wheel and lifted it from its support and took the girl's hand in his.

'The end — or the beginning,' he told her gently. 'You'll have noticed, whiles, that they're both of them in the same place.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

It was very hot in the big swamp. And a big storm was brewing. But Con liked heat and thoroughly enjoyed a storm. He liked cold, too. Extremes of all kinds appealed to him. Perhaps he liked to feel himself superior to externals; perhaps it was only the instinct of a large vitality to expend itself. He liked, too, the thousand scents of the swamp, its hot, moist breath with its wild mingling of new life and old decay. He liked its shallow pools, brown above mosaics of skeleton leaves, its deeper pools green as the lush greenness they mirrored, the grotesque fungi, even the sucking gurgle of the bog, as his accustomed feet passed safely through its secret ways.

The swamp had shrunken greatly since he had known it first. Already the adjective 'big' was a courtesy only. Axe and drain were pushing through. In the slashing, great roots flung their torn and twisted limbs in a last abandonment. Swamp land was good land, the farmers said, when the sun had sweetened it. Soon the sun would claim it all.

Con's hut, relic of long days of boyish industry, was built upon rising ground. The trees which had once clothed its clearing were now the logs of the hut walls. Mosses crept up to the doorsill and even over it. Trailing brambles spread their tangles to trap the unwary. There was a musical murmur of water near. Right across the faintly trodden path, a perfect fairy ring had sprung up overnight.

Con, lounging in the doorway of the hut, looked at it and thought of Gilda dancing in the tropical forest of Mrs. Sowerby's stage. And as he thought, he dug his boot heel into the mosses under it. He was going back to-morrow. Two days of solitude and long thinking had left him exactly where he was, save for a certain quieting of nerves and con-

centration of force which close contact with nature always gave him. Efforts to prepare himself by taking thought for the new developments of his life had not resulted very satisfactorily. But his convictions had deepened. He loved Gilda. She had come upon him entirely from the outside. In no way was she a product of his own thought or expectation. But she was there, and he loved her, not with passion only, but with something more — a certainty that in her he had found his mate. The next thing was the winning. Con had little of that humility ascribed to the perfect lover. Instinct, which in him was freer than in most, had already told him that the call of his blood was the call of hers also. He had not doubted his power to marry Gilda. What he had doubted was his strength to win her in the only way which might level the balance between them. Victory, not capitulation, was the necessity here.

That he had a chance to hold out was due, he knew, to the training of Miss Tucker. He had been fortunate in his aunt. Martha Tucker was one of those women who acquire by intuition and observation what could never be theirs through experience. Freud had not spoken then and psycho-analysis was for the future, but Miss Tucker had known Con's father and had come to an understanding of the tragedy of a man who consistently denies his own nature. Therefore, instead of inhibiting Con's natural impulses she had attempted, not without much inward trembling, to develop in him an understanding, and an indulgence controlled by reason. The young Conway had possessed a strong will and excellent powers of logic and the plan had answered well. He developed a standard within himself combined with a growing power to realize it.

The matter of his religious education which had given Miss Tucker some anxiety resulted in his being sent to the Church of England Sunday-School. She herself, following an extended visit to Boston, had become a convinced Theo-

sophist. But she felt that Con's mother would not have 'liked' Theosophy. It became a matter of conscience not to influence the child, and her religious doctrines were advanced as possible opinions only. When one night, Con, flushed and restless, sat up in bed and demanded suddenly where God got all the new souls from, she said, 'I have often wondered.' It did not seem necessary to announce her own leaning toward reincarnation. She even worried a little over whether she had inadvertently done so when Con, following out his own thought, added: 'Perhaps He uses the old ones over again.' She was relieved when in the morning he had forgotten that he had ever been concerned with the origin of souls.

One thing, however, Con learned most thoroughly — the relation between act and consequence. Miss Tucker forgave sin, but never palliated it, and Con grew to have a healthy regard for what came after. It helped him to walk warily. Even to stop and think — as he was thinking now. To win Gilda, and to wed her when she was won, would call for all his reserves. It wasn't going to be easy . . . Well, he had never valued the easy thing!

With a sigh of relief and acceptance, Con carefully patted back into place the mosses which his boot heel had disturbed and, straightening his shoulders, turned back into the hut. To-morrow he would go home. The prelude stage of his life was over. To-morrow —

'C-on, Con!'

It was his own name, muffled by barriers of wood tangle, but evidently quite close.

'Here!' he called, striding out into the clearing.

'Where?' called the voice like a lost and laughing echo. He waited a moment to locate the sound of crashing bushes, and then directed: 'To the left and straight ahead.'

There was more noise of breaking branches and then, into the dim path which faced him across the clearing, a girl's

figure emerged. There was only one girl in Blencarrow who had a figure like that.

'Goodness gracious!' said Gilda, half laughing, half petulant. 'What a time I've had! I thought I was never going to get here alive.'

She was very hot. Little rings of hair, dark with moisture, clung to her temples. Her thin blouse clung to her shoulders. A long bramble scratch showed redly on her bare forearm.

'Hoots!' said Gilda, kicking a fat bit of mud from the heel of a ridiculous slipper. 'It's war-rum!' The double *r*'s rippled out in Sandy McCorquodale's best manner. But Con did not laugh.

'How did you get here?' he asked coldly.

'Heat, dust, mud, and flies,' chanted Gilda. 'That's how I journeyed to St. Ives — Ouch! I'm tired!'

Con's glance followed hers to the ruined slippers.

'I'm sorry you're tired,' he said, politely, 'because it's a long way back.'

'I was beginning to get nervous,' said Gilda, fanning herself with an absurd handkerchief, 'for I lost the path back there a bit. And it looks as if we were going to have a storm. Is there a bog under this moss, or does one sit on it?'

Con reëntered the cabin and brought from it a home-made chair. He was feeling a great many things and feeling them all at once. And not for the first time he noticed signs of the storm she spoke of. During his reverie, the light in the clearing had changed from the usual clear primrose of sundown to a particularly lurid dusk. The air by the hut was so still that not even the tendrils of the creepers stirred, yet already the tops of the tallest trees were bending as if pressed downward by a moving hand.

'It is coming very quickly,' said Con. 'You had better come inside the hut. Better not walk through the fairy ring — it's considered unlucky.'

'Not when you are the Principal Fairy,' said Gilda cheerfully. 'Principal Fairies know the proper thing to say —

*'Hickory, Dickory, Dithory, Den,
Where you see one fairy I can see ten!'*

Lifting her feet daintily, she stepped over the magic circle and, as she did so, the wind swooped upon the clearing with a whistling roar.

'There she comes!' said Con. 'It will be a deluge. I'll have to put the windows in.'

Working quickly and paying no further attention to his guest, he fitted the frames into their oblong openings, the tapping of his hammer scarcely heard above the wind. Two of the panes were cracked and one broken. The broken one he stuffed with an old jersey.

'We'll leave the door open until the rain comes,' he said; 'otherwise we'll suffocate. You are alone?'

'Of course I'm alone,' somewhat crossly. 'Kathy wouldn't take me. But I found her map and came myself.'

'Oh!' said Con. It was an 'oh' of comprehension. He remembered with an inward smile the three 'secret parchments' which he had presented to Euan, Kathy, and Garry in their school days — parchments which had bestowed upon them the freedom of the swamp. He remembered the discussion, held frankly in her presence, as to whether Kathy, as a girl, should be permitted a map. And how Kathrine had declared that she was going to play 'evens' or not at all. Garry had backed her up and the other two had yielded with some misgivings.

'Either the map is crazy or some of the landmarks are gone,' resumed Gilda. 'I had a perfectly frightful time . . . I'm afraid my ankle is twisted,' in a voice of fortitude.

She held out the injured member and supported it on her hand. It didn't look twisted. As an ankle it looked quite straight and charming — even though the light stocking which covered it was splashed and stained.

Con did not see it. He was looking out at the bending trees and patently thinking of nothing else.

'We're in for a cloudburst!' he exclaimed. And Gilda, forgetting its sensitive condition, let her ankle drop sharply, as a crackling roar of thunder shook the cabin.

With that came the rain. It wasn't an ordinary downpour, but a sluicing torrent of water as if from some celestial reserve which had burst directly above them. The window panes were blind with it; the very roof seemed to sag under its assault.

Gilda looked up at the ominous droop with widening eyes. 'It's *bending!*' she said. 'Oh, Con, you won't let it come down, will you?'

It seemed to him that this was the first perfectly natural thing he had ever heard her say. Even her voice was different. It had lost its clear cadence and was a child's voice, small and frightened.

'I think it will hold,' said Con. 'This can't keep up longer than a few moments.'

But it did keep up. The burst reservoir seemed bottomless. Leaks started in a dozen places; waterfalls cascaded down the log walls. A spreading pool crept beneath the closed door. Big drops fell on Gilda's upturned face.

'Is it a tornado?' she asked timidly — 'or a cyclone?'

'Neither,' said Con. 'Move your chair here and put this over your shoulders.' He produced a rubber horse-blanket from beneath the bed.

Gilda moved her chair meekly. She had forgotten about the injured ankle. Another crash of thunder started her shivering.

'That was a near one,' said Con.

'Has this hut — this house any lightning rods?' asked Gilda. Her teeth wanted to chatter.

Con laughed. He couldn't afford to be anything but angry with Gilda. But he did not like to hear her teeth chatter.

'The hut is fairly safe,' he assured her. 'There are no tall trees near enough to be a danger. There is no fear of fire either. If the lightning starts anything, this deluge will put it out. Besides — listen! It's not coming so fiercely now.'

His trained ear had, indeed, noticed a faint diminution of the roar and in a few moments the change was perceptible to Gilda also. The rain was settling down into a steady, drenching pour. Grey darkness still lay against the panes and the lightning played incessantly, but the thunder rumbled now instead of cracked. The highest fury of the storm was spent. Gilda, seated under the horse-blanket in the one dry spot in the room, began to recover herself.

'This will mean cooler weather anyway,' she said languidly.

Con turned from the window.

'Yes,' he said. 'It will probably be a beautiful day tomorrow. A pleasant change after the heat. But we can't expect to have really cool weather this time of year.'

Gilda dimpled. 'Well, if you don't want to talk about the weather,' said she, 'choose a topic of conversation for yourself.'

'Do your people know where you are, Gilda?'

'That's not conversing; that's asking questions.'

'Do they know where you are?'

'No, they don't.'

'Does Kathy know you stole the map?'

'Stole?' innocently; 'oh, you mean "borrowed." She may know it. But I didn't tell her.'

'Where did you say you were going? I suppose you told your mother you were going somewhere.'

'Of course I did,' said Gilda virtuously. 'I never let Mumsy worry. I told her I was going to play tennis with Amy Graham.'

Con glanced at the untennis-like shoes and his lip curved indulgently. It was so like Lucia Fenwell not to have noticed the shoes.

'Have you ever stayed all night with Miss Graham?'

Gilda bobbed a neat curtsy and stuck the tip of a pink finger in her mouth.

'Yes — yer honour,' she answered meekly.

'Then they will think you have stayed on account of the storm — unless they telephone.'

'Sure yer honour knows that we've no telephone,' said Gilda.

'The Grahams have. Kathrine might run out to some one else's telephone.'

'She might, but she won't.' Gilda discarded her childish pose. 'Kathy's silly about borrowing telephones. And I'll be home before they begin to wonder.'

'You won't be home to-night,' said Con flatly.

Light leapt into Gilda's eyes — the light of battle. 'You mean you will keep me here?'

'Keep you!' Con's tone of bored tolerance was perfect. 'I am afraid you have been reading novels, child. But it looks as if I shall have to let you stay. I can't turn you out into the swamp.'

'I will go directly, please.' Gilda was stung this time. She rose with some dignity.

Con threw open the door. It was deep dusk in the clearing. Under the trees it was night. The rain fell, a steady, soaking monotony. A small tree with its barricade of branches lay across the entrance to the path. Through the lulling wind they could hear the choking gurgle of the swamp. Con shut the door.

'I'll light the lamp,' he said.

The chimney of the lamp was broken at the top and the light was smoky.

'The trail is impassable to-night,' he went on, trimming the wick with a claspknife. 'But we have been having such dry weather that if the rain stops by midnight the chances are that by morning we may be able to get out. I have my

axe, of course. The wind will have put down dead timber everywhere.'

'I can't stay here!'

'I am sorry that it should be necessary.'

'Oh! Con, don't tease! You've got to get me home somehow. And I'll never forget how horrid you've been — never!'

'Sorry my manners do not please you. But I have never posed as a knight errant. And the situation, you must admit, is annoying. I expect I'm a somewhat selfish person — like you, Gilda,' he ended more cheerfully.

Gilda stamped her foot. (She had honestly tried to break herself of this. But it came back.)

'You are hateful!'

'I am glad that the ankle is better,' said Con thoughtfully. 'We shall have tough going in the morning.'

'I am going now,' sullenly.

'Very well.'

Gilda changed her tactics.

'It's Mother I'm worried about,' said she; 'if by any chance she finds I'm not with Amy, she will be frightened to death.'

Con nodded. 'I'm afraid she will.'

'You could carry me over the bad places, couldn't you?' very sweetly.

'No. And I shan't try. Is this really the first time you have run up against consequences, Gilda? You will find them fairly thick as you go along.'

'But I only wanted to see the hut.'

'Well, you do see it . . . And now I think we had better have something to eat. It's all tinned stuff, but I can make a cup of tea and there's a heel of a loaf left. After we've had supper, I'll wrap you up in blankets so the damp won't hurt you. I'm used to it myself. Then we had both better get some sleep.'

The cold deliberation of this programme did more to con-

vince Gilda of the reality of her plight than any amount of argument. The only thing to do was to give in peaceably — and to turn the surrender to account.

‘I feel so — so queer,’ she said faintly.

‘You’re hungry,’ assured Con. ‘Kind of gone feeling below the chin. I know it well. Which shall it be — salmon or sardines?’

Gilda was understood to murmur that it didn’t matter.

‘Then I’ll choose,’ said Con. ‘Sardines it is!’

‘They’re oily,’ objected Gilda. ‘Salmon’s so much nicer.’

‘Too late now. I’ve let the air in. I say, there’s no milk for the tea — sorry!’

Gilda, sitting on her feet to keep them from the damp, watched him make tea with eyes bright and hard as a bird’s. Her first panic had quickly passed. She knew there was nothing to be panicky about — except the remote possibility of some outsider learning of her escapade. With the proper sort of company the situation might have had its moments. But Con was distinctly not the right sort. And that camp bed against the wet wall looked thoroughly uncomfortable. It had a drop in the middle and no pillow at all — ugh! Sleeping on it wouldn’t be a bit of fun.

Con, she supposed, would have to sleep in the chair — the floor was far too wet. Under really thrilling circumstances the young man in the case would have insisted upon sleeping outside in the rain, allowing her to bolt the door. He might even have handed her a revolver so that she might feel quite comfy. But Con was not likely to think of any of these delicacies. All he offered her was — sardines.

She wished she hadn’t come . . . why had she come? . . . In her heart she knew why — she had got tired of waiting. No one had ever kept her waiting — well, she was sure of one thing now. She hated Con. Oh, how she hated him!

‘Lift the sardine gently by the tail,’ instructed Con, ‘and

slap him on the bread before he breaks in the middle — or perhaps you would like the fork. I don't need it.'

'I hate to take advantage of such generosity,' said Gilda, 'but I will take the fork — thank you.'

Being very hungry, she found it hard to eat as if she weren't. The heel of the loaf and the sardines disappeared quickly. The tea was quite good.

'You may smoke if you wish,' she accorded him graciously.

'Thanks — very good of you.' Con produced a battered pipe and began to fill it.

'I can't see why women do not smoke too,' said Gilda. 'Pretty soon they will.'

'Always have,' said Con. 'All the old squaws up North do.'

'I mean women like me. But of course you would think that shocking.'

'Not at all. I've a spare pipe somewhere if you'd like to try.'

'No, thanks,' shortly.

'It's a clay pipe. You might blow bubbles with it,' suggested he kindly.

How she hated him!

'I'm not much good at entertainment,' went on Con. 'Rough, you know. Do you play poker?'

'Do you?' evenly. 'I thought poker was gambling.'

'Well, I'm a gambler.'

Gilda forgot that she hated him. It was exciting to be all alone with a gambler.

'Do you gamble money?' she asked.

Con sighed. 'Everything,' he said. 'Lost my boots once.'

'What did you do?'

'Wore another pair . . . and learned a lesson.'

'What lesson?'

Con's blue eyes, full of amused understanding, looked straight into hers.

'To be a good loser,' he said.

Yes — she certainly hated him! . . . But she would get even . . . she always did get even . . .

'How about bed?' asked Con with a tremendous yawn. He walked over and felt the mattress on the cot. 'Wet on the sides, but dry in the middle,' he announced. 'I'll put a couple of blankets down and you can roll up in them. Better take off your shoes and anything else that's uncomfortable.'

Gilda removed her shoes. 'A-oo,' she shivered as she slipped between the blankets. 'My feet are c-cold . . . I can't tuck these horrid things in —'

'Let me.' Con was now the perfect host. 'I often tuck the blankets in for Aunt . . . is that better? . . . Would you like a hot brick?'

Gilda declined the hot brick so snappily that Con shook his head.

'I'll really have to teach you poker,' he murmured.

The light went out. She could hear him whistling softly as he arranged the horse-blanket across the home-made chair.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

GILDA had felt sure of a wakeful night, but, being very tired and completely healthy, she fell asleep at once and did not wake until morning.

Not so Con. In an inadequate blanket and an uncomfortable chair, he listened to the monotonous padding of the rain until his mind seemed as sodden with it as the ground outside. About one o'clock it ceased, and with a relieved sigh he dozed, to dream that he was rescuing Gilda from an army of giant toadstools which sprang up as fast as he cut them down. He awoke to the cool breeze of a rain-washed morning.

Gilda was still sleeping. Her long lashes, in colour like an autumn beech, lay lacelike on cheeks flushed gently like a very young child's. Her disordered hair made a glowing patch upon the dull grey blanket. She had pushed it back from her face, and Con saw, with a tightening of the heart, a thin red scar with a puckered dent in the middle . . . it was true, then, that story about her leaving home! If a wish could have slain Gilbert Fenwell, he probably would have died then and there.

The blanket had slipped a little to one side. Con replaced it shyly, noting, as he did so, how the small hands, even in repose, gave one the suggestion of nervous force at variance with their slim fragility. She was no weakling, this newfound mate of his.

Gently he set the door ajar to the chill sweetness of the morning air and, with the practical quiet of the woodsman, lit the fire in the rusty stove. Presently there was the comforting smell of hot coffee and frying bacon. There was no bread left, he noted ruefully — nothing but damp crackers in a tin whose lid he had neglected to close. He put a selec-

tion of these on top of the stove to crisp and, taking the pail, went out to the spring for water.

While he was gone, Gilda yawned, stretched, and was turning over to sleep again when she remembered where she was. When Con returned, he found her sitting very wide awake, indeed, on the edge of a hastily tidied bed.

'The water is horribly muddied,' said Con. 'But it's better than nothing.' As he spoke he poured it into an ancient tin basin. 'There is one clean towel. But I used the last whack of soap yesterday. You see I intended going home to-day, anyway.'

'I am glad not to have hurried your arrangements,' said Gilda frigidly.

'Oh — that's all right.' Con was cheerfully polite. 'Tuck in to breakfast, will you? We must make an early start. The question is, had I better take you to my aunt's, which is much nearer, and have Kathy bring your shoes and stockings and things, or would you rather go right home and risk meeting people?'

'I shall go directly home, thank you.'

'I think the other is the better plan. But it's for you to decide. In any case, you are going to be pretty tired. It's no child's play getting through the swamp this morning and there is a considerable stretch of bad road after that. I wish you had decent shoes.'

Gilda, drinking her coffee, said merely: 'What time shall I reach town?'

'About six if you're a good walker. But why the first person singular?'

'Once we're all clear of the swamp, I prefer to go on alone.'

'Can't be done,' firmly. 'But if you like, I'll leave you as soon as we strike the sidewalks. I'll call in later and explain to Mrs. Fenwell.'

'You will do no such thing!' Gilda's face flamed. 'I am not a baby.'

'You are a very young girl,' placidly, 'and I feel a certain amount of responsibility. I don't want your mother to be worried. Nor Kathrine either.'

Gilda looked up from her coffee. Was it fancy or had his voice changed when he mentioned Kathrine's name? The doubt as to the brotherliness of Con's affection for Kathrine came back and with it a keener stab of dismay. But there was no time to ponder pros and cons just then. Nor did their struggle through the bush present opportunities for analysis. In spite of Con's axe, his carefulness, and the strength of his arm, Gilda emerged from that ordeal very short of breath and temper. Consequences, which hitherto had troubled her little, were beginning to exact toll. The further stretch of road, down which she had tripped so gaily yesterday, loomed terrifyingly long and hard. But she had determined to be a proud lady.

'I shall be quite all right alone now,' said Gilda firmly. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' said Con. 'I can tag along behind if you like it better. Seems silly, though — every time you want to speak to me you'll have to turn round to do it.'

'I have no desire to speak to you at all,' said Gilda. 'But of course, if you persist in coming, there is no sense in appearing more absurd than we already are.'

'My idea exactly,' agreed Con.

They walked together down the muddy road. Where it was particularly slippery, Con offered his arm and Gilda took it. Neither spoke to the other. They were really enjoying themselves very much. And, now that she could think again, Gilda's thoughts were busy . . . would it be wise to tell Con of the break between Kathrine and Garry? If she told him suddenly, she might surprise something of his secret feeling (and he would be sure to know before long in any case). On the other hand, if Con felt only friendship for Kathy, the fact of Garry's freedom might be supposed to

annoy him considerably for other reasons. It was a shot worth trying.

They were in sight of the first sidewalk when she finally spoke.

'Of course,' she said, with the air of one who asks a favour, 'you will be careful to say nothing to Garry Enigh about this?'

Con's eyebrows rose.

'To Garry?' he repeated musingly. 'Why to Garry? But that, I suppose, is what you want me to ask?'

Gilda flushed angrily, but held to her point.

'I thought you might speak of it thinking him still one of the family,' she explained.

'And isn't he one of the family?'

'No, he isn't. He and Kathy have called it off.'

Con whistled. Gilda, who was very intent, could make nothing of the whistle. Neither could she read the look on his face. Her small bolt had launched itself in vain.

'I wasn't sure whether Kathy had told you,' she added innocently.

'No,' said Con, 'she did not tell me.' He walked on faster than Gilda liked. She wished now that she had spoken earlier. They walked down the last small hill in silence.

'You know,' said Con abruptly, 'I can't see what in the devil you did it for.'

Gilda opened her lips and shut them again.

'If it had been any one but Kathy —' Con's face was gloomy — 'but in the case of a sister, I should have thought it would have been "hands off."'

'I don't know what you are talking about.' This was admirably careless, but had just exactly no effect whatever upon Con, who brushed it aside with a large hand.

'I am talking about your absurd affair with Garry,' he said.

They had come to the first of the straggling sidewalks, and

Gilda, always an artist, felt that both place and moment invited a last word. She paused.

'It isn't absurd and it is not an affair,' she said slowly. 'Garry and I — I'm afraid you do not understand the situation as well as I thought you did.' Her momentary confusion was well done and she managed a blush. 'I'll go on from here alone, please.'

Con's hand fell heavily on her shoulder and stopped her as she turned. Was he furiously angry? . . . What was he going to do? Gilda's usually well-behaved heart throbbed in her throat . . . she flushed and paled . . . and ended by being very pale, indeed. For Con did nothing at all. The hand lifted immediately and it was with his usual unhurried drawl that he said:

'All right. Better keep to the side streets. I'll see your mother later.' And, while she still waited, he left her . . .

Trembling with anger, Gilda hurried through the streets. It was very early. Near the Maddock Organ Works she met a few workmen. A milk cart rattled by, and here and there doors were opened. But she met no one she knew and reached her home street with a sigh of satisfaction . . . consequences, she reflected, were not inevitable, after all.

But it happened that Gilda was not the only member of the Fenwell family who had been out all night. Turning sharply in at the gate, she found the path blocked by no less a person than Gilbert himself, who leaned negligently against the gatepost, contemplating the universe. He was solemn and dignified and occupied the whole of the passage.

'Nice hour this to 'rive home,' said Gilbert, articulating with fair efficacy. 'Nice behaviour, I muss shay!'

'Get out of my way!' ordered Gilda briefly. A glance had told her that in this condition he was negligible.

'S-saucy!' said Gilbert with ponderous pleasantry. He made no effort to move and his bleary gaze roamed blinkingly over the disturbed and impatient figure before him. It

reached her splashed stocking and ruined shoes and, momentarily, his once keen intelligence flared up. '*Swamp mud!*' he exclaimed, and broke into a chuckle of outrageous laughter.

Gilda's patience snapped. With a fierce little gesture she pushed the elbow which lay heavily on the gatepost and, his only support removed, Gilbert lost his balance and succumbed to the attraction of gravity.

Gilda stepped daintily over his sprawling legs.

She did not glance behind the lilac bush and therefore missed the moonlike gaze of James Duffy, who, having just convoyed Gilbert home, remained a puzzled spectator of this domestic episode.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

JANET CAMERON, opening her front door with the idea of letting in and imprisoning the first freshness of the morning air, looked interestedly after the rapidly disappearing figure of a girl in crumpled muslin and no hat. Then, hearing furtive steps in her kitchen, she turned to confront Euan who, surreptitiously, was bringing in the cat.

'Take that cat and they kittens out of my kitchen!' said Janet. 'And be quickly!' — she added in a terrifying tone.

Neither Euan nor the old black cat seemed to mind, and the five black kittens were too new and too nearly drowned to understand. Euan dried the fifth kitten neatly and put it where it would be likely to find sustenance. Then he looked up at his mother and grinned.

'Patients of mine,' he explained. 'Sorry!'

'I'll have no cat hospital here,' said Janet grimly. 'Forby, if there's an ungrateful body living, it's that cat. Why would I put a warm basket in the back porch and she never going near it? Like as not you found her in a hole under the shed.'

'I found her,' said Euan, 'in the bottom of an old barrel by the back gate. She must have moved in last night before the storm. You should have seen her trying to keep the family from being drowned.'

'Aye, she's a wiselike mother,' admitted Janet. 'But,' with a return of grimness, 'they kittens might as well be drowned one way as another.'

Euan repressed a smile. He knew that Janet had never drowned a kitten in her life.

'They say drowning is an easy death,' said Janet defiantly.

'Is it?' in a relieved tone. 'I've often wondered. The balance of evidence —'

'And how could I possibly be finding good homes for five of them?' asked Janet. 'If I send them to the country, it's barn cats they'll be.'

'Better a barn cat than no cat at all,' said Euan. 'Besides, one never knows — aren't they pretty?'

Janet admitted that Old Sokey always had pretty kittens. She came of a good-looking family. 'But I can't keep them,' she added firmly. 'Or maybe just to get them dried and warm . . . wait, you, and I'll get an old flannen shirt of your father's. It's wool the purr things need. Be getting some milk warmed, Euan.'

'I did that,' guiltily, 'but I poured off the cream for the porridge first.'

'Sakes!' exclaimed Janet, 'and if that isn't the man of it — always thinking of cream to their porridge. And a doctor, too, who should be knowing that it's cream purr Sokey needs.'

Euan rose laughing. 'There — take that!' he said, giving her a robust kiss under which she blushed distressfully. 'Woman, you are deceiving me! Confess that you got up early for nothing else but to find that cat.'

'I was afeared she might be in my best bonnet box,' admitted Janet.

'Don't try to excuse yourself,' sternly. 'You stand convicted as aider and abettor of this cat. What time is it?'

'Only half after six. There's your father rising now. Euan, did you see aught but the cat when you were in the garden?'

'No. Why?'

'Only that I was wondering — did you not see who was passing awhile since?'

'No, I was cat fishing. How could I?'

Janet nodded. 'She might have been coming from the doctor's,' she said absently.

'Who?'

'But if she were, she must have slipped on a crossing — such mud and splashings on good clothes I never saw.'

'Whose clothes?' asked her son patiently.

'On the other hand,' went on Janet, 'it would hardly be the doctor's either. For he is staying the night at Simpson's farm where there's twins expectit. Forby, there was green on her skirt and she'd get no green from slipping on a crossing.'

'Who?' said Euan. 'For the third and last time — who?'

'Did I not tell you? It was that little Gilda Fenwell. And I misdoubt she's been up to mischief.'

'Oh, Mother!' exclaimed Euan reproachfully.

'I'm not saying so, Euan. I'm merely obsairving that I misdoubt. Where would a decent lass be coming from at six of the morning and in the state of yon?'

'Anywhere,' with exasperation. 'She might be coming from anywhere.'

'We will hope 'twas so,' said Janet darkly.

Euan knew the futility of argument. He watched the warming of the flannel shirt and the establishment of the cat family in silence.

'You won't mention it, Mother,' he ventured at last.

'There would be no occasion to mention it. Your mother is not a gossip, Euan.'

'I know, Mother, but — now, look here, I'm sure it's something perfectly simple.'

'It might be,' cautiously. 'And that would be a good thing too. If I knew the why of it, I could just say —'

'But you've just said you wouldn't say anything!'

'Without occasion, I would not.'

'But, Mother —'

'Whist. I hear your father. And he'll not be liking to hear you gossiping in the morning . . . There's five kittens, all black, Andrew,' she added, 'but I'm not keeping them, of course.'

Andrew walked over and looked down at the purring cat.

'Would that be my best wool shirt, Janet?' he asked mildly.

'It would not. Nor your second best. Nor yet your third.'

'It looks a good shirt. A puir man might be glad of it.'

'A puir cat is glad of it now,' said Janet tartly; 'if the two of you would take your porridge instead of havering, I'd be obliged.'

Euan ate his breakfast with fair appetite and departed to his morning's work of putting fresh shingles on the henhouse. He felt lonely and unsettled. He missed Cynthia . . . nice girl, Cynthia. Never expecting impossible things, yet somehow always keeping a fellow up to it . . . Euan had an uneasy fear that he needed some keeping up — would need it still more in the future . . . unless it were true, as older people insisted, that time brings forgetfulness. He couldn't feel that time would bring forgetfulness to him . . . Even if it did, wouldn't forgetting be the greatest loss of all? He tried to think of the world without this thing which was now the spring of his life, its bitter and its sweet, and the effort frightened him with the awful blank which it evoked. It would be like living on in a dead world. He couldn't face that.

He decided that in the afternoon he would run over to the Rectory. He hadn't seen Garry since the Festival. And something in his mother's tale of Gilda, early and unaccounted for, had made him want to see him — just to be reassured. Garry would be the first to know of anything wrong at the Fenwells'. He would know, too, if there was anything one might do to help. This decision made him feel better and he finished the henhouse with despatch.

The morning had been delicious, but its freshness was gone by noon. The afternoon was again hotly moist. Another storm, known in Blencarrow as a 'chaser,' would be

necessary to thoroughly clear the air. It was nervy weather. Euan, approaching the Fenwell house on his way to the Rectory, looked at it with a certain apprehension. Its fateful look struck him anew. He had always thought that it waited for something. But surely by now it should have become resigned. Trees had grown up around it. A climbing rosebush crept up its flat and ugly front, draping the door which led nowhere. Shrubs and bushes hid much of its gauntness from the road. It must have given up wanting to be finished long ago.

Euan's step quickened as he saw that there was some one at the gate. It was Kathrine trying to fix its sagging hinges with some screws and a screwdriver. She looked hot and tired.

'They won't stay in!' she said, removing a screw from between her lips to say it. 'I've put them in dozens of times, and as soon as any one leans on the gate they come out again.' It was plain from her injured tone what she thought of this behaviour on the part of the screws.

'Let's see,' said Euan. 'The holes are too big,' he announced after inspection. 'What you need are plugs of wood hammered into the holes and very much larger screws which will go through and bite into the solid wood behind. I'll come along and fix it first thing to-morrow.'

'Early?' asked Kathrine, hesitating.

'As early as ever was.'

She smiled. 'That will be nice of you. I'm not a bit too proud to have you mend it, Euan, but I'd hate to have the McCorquodales see you doing it.'

'Since when have you minded the McCorquodales?'

'Always,' frankly. 'At least about little things — like gates. It makes me sore all over to have people know all our little shifts and struggles. It's none of their business.'

She looked so like herself as a little girl as she said this that Euan had an instantaneous picture of her, flushed and

defiant, sweeping out the hall for the singing school. How she must have hated it and how plucky she had been!

'It will be done before you're up to-morrow,' he promised. 'I'm clever with gates. And I roofed our henhouse this morning. I'm going over to see Garry now. Haven't seen him for ages.'

Kathrine dropped the screwdriver, and when he had picked it up for her, he saw that the heat flush had died out of her face. It looked white and cold and, oddly enough, smaller.

'I thought he might be here,' stammered Euan, miserably conscious of saying the wrong thing, as usual. 'I'll hurry along now before he goes out. See you to-morrow . . .'

But what on earth had happened that Kathy should look like that? . . .

Garry was not in the Rectory garden, so, having looked for him casually in the woodshed, Euan propped himself against the garden wall and whistled. All Garry's friends had long ago taken to whistling as a means of circumventing the front door and Mrs. Binns. But, though Euan whistled very loudly, no head appeared at any window. Garry must be out. Or he might be ill. In any case, his failure to answer made Euan doubly anxious to see him. As a last resort he rang the bell. The bell, after a proper interval, brought Mrs. Binns.

Euan raised his hat. 'I have been whistling for Garry,' he explained obviously, 'but he doesn't seem to hear me.'

'If 'e don't seem to, 'e probably don't,' said Mrs. Binns sourly.

'Could you tell me where he probably is?'

Mrs. Binns considered. To confess complete ignorance would be a satisfaction. But to do so would be to deny herself a satisfaction more subtle. To impart news was the outstanding joy of Mrs. Binns' life.

'E might be down at Caldicott's buying himself some

shirts,' she said grudgingly. 'Seein' as 'ow 'e is short on shirts and wot with 'im goin' to Hingland hunexpected, shirts will be needed.'

Euan, with a mind unprepared, was unable to prevent the start which was as sweet savour to Mrs. Binns. But he rallied instantly.

'So he would,' he agreed. 'But I didn't know he was leavin' so soon.'

'Hif you knew 'e was leavin' at all,' said Mrs. Binns with an air of dark mystery, 'you knew more than 'e did. Very hupsetting such suddenness, I will say. And hif you ask me —'

'Good-afternoon, Euan,' broke in the Rector's quiet voice. 'Thank you, Mrs. Binns. That will do.'

To be told 'that will do' was the crowning indignity of Mrs. Binns' state of servitude. It was the one thing which entirely robbed her of speech. No one in Blencarrow was ever told 'that will do.' It was, so Mrs. Binns declared, 'a relict of the middle hages.' But, conqueror as she was in many fields, she had never succeeded in wresting from the Rector this shred of mastership.

'Come in, Euan,' went on the Rector; 'or rather, I will come out. We will find what breeze there is in the garden.'

'I was looking for Garry.' Euan's bewilderment made him awkward. 'Is he — I didn't know he was going away.'

'It is rather sudden,' said the Rector. 'A matter of business — to be exact, a small legacy.'

'Oh!' Euan brightened up. 'That's pleasant. A short business trip, I suppose?'

'The length of his stay is not certain yet.' Mr. Dwight looked kindly at Euan whom he liked very much. 'Don't feel hurt at his not telling you,' he went on. 'He didn't know himself. The decision is unexpected.'

'I saw Kathrine as I passed,' said Euan. 'She said nothing about it.'

'She probably feels sensitive. But she agrees that under the circumstances he is wise to go. Absence will make things easier for every one.'

'Easier? I don't understand. You don't mean that there is anything wrong? They haven't — quarrelled?'

The Rector sighed.

'Nothing so hopeful as that, I'm afraid,' he said. 'But their engagement is at an end. I thought you might have heard.'

Euan stared at his informant and a dark flush threw his freckles into bold relief.

'Garry has done that?' he said slowly.

The Rector nodded.

'Yes. Or, rather, Kathrine has, if we want to quibble.'

Euan ignored this.

'And now he's — running away?'

'Going away,' corrected Mr. Dwight patiently. 'It's not as simple as you imply. Garry isn't a coward. He is facing something very difficult with a good deal of courage. He is most unhappy.'

Euan's face, young and hard, showed plainly that he considered Garry's unhappiness well deserved. 'I have no right to say anything,' he muttered, looking away.

'I don't know. Friendship has rights. And you have been a good friend. That is why I am explaining a little. I fear the breaking of this engagement was inevitable. Better it should come now than later . . . Garry has gone downtown. Will you wait for him?'

'No,' said Euan. 'I don't want to see him. Not now. I didn't know about this . . . There must be two Garrys. The Garry I knew would never have treated — Kathy — like that!'

'Probably not. There are two of most of us, I think. And harmony comes late — if it comes at all.' The fine, austere face was sad and troubled. 'Victory and defeat — it is all

part of the same process. And we who make such cruel mistakes ourselves do well to practise charity toward others.'

But Euan's intolerant blue eyes held small fund of charity. Charity is all very well and mistakes do happen, but there are certain things which no proper man has a right to be mistaken in . . . no man . . . under any circumstances . . . ever . . .

'I can't talk about it,' he said hastily. 'But thank you for telling me. It doesn't seem possible, but I suppose it is. Life's rather a muddle, isn't it?'

'It is — tangled,' said the Rector. And, as he looked after Euan hurrying away, he repeated 'tangled' with an understanding sigh.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

EUAN left the Rectory in what may be described as a state of mind — the phrase, as used in Blencarrow, implying not one state of mind, but several. He was angry and bewildered and something else which did not yield readily to definition. The anger and bewilderment he understood and could account for. Anger was just and fitting, the only possible reaction to a situation which had brought sorrow and humiliation upon Kathrine. Bewilderment was inevitable as the result of finding that the friend he had known all his life was not known to him at all. (Garry, sensitive, honourable, sincere — how had he done this amazing thing?) But the third feeling, or combination of feelings, was something for which the circumstances did not satisfactorily account. It was a feeling of lightness, a sudden relief from some half-realized load. He seemed more alive. He walked fast and grew very hot and felt fierce and immensely strong. But why? Perhaps it was rage that stimulated him. A girl like Kathrine —

His thought veered to Kathrine and the rage dropped away. The other feeling, the mixture of lightness and strength, drew back ashamed and he knew it for what it was. He knew that he had dared to hope, and hope, in view of a girl's face, small and cold, was a selfishness really disgraceful. Euan was horrified at himself and sprang upon the fluttering, newborn thing with fierce derision.

Kathrine was free . . . what difference did freedom make to Kathrine? He had seen what difference it made — seen it in close-shut lips and withdrawn eyes. The bond which had held her had never been ring or spoken word. If she had loved Garry, she would go on loving him. The logic of this was terribly plain.

And yet, hope lives by its own life. And in spite of his logic and in spite of his derision, Euan hoped. The one irremediable thing had not happened. The invisible wall which had shut her away was down. A young and limitless world held them both. Reproach himself as he might, life was all agog once more with the bitter-sweet of possibility.

Lost in the chaos of his emotions, Euan had walked on without conscious thought of direction. The initial impulse to go to Kathrine had been thwarted by common sense, so that the automatic mind, unguided, had done the next best thing and had led him to a place where Kathrine often used to be. He found that he had taken the road over the south hill and into the hollow where the dark creek ran. The creek had no name of its own, being too small to bother with, but as children they had called it the Dark Creek for no clearly explained reason. Perhaps the grove of willows near the bend had something to do with it. In those days it had been possible to bathe there, but it was years now since that glory had departed. The stream ran shallow and the trees on the nearer bank had been cut down. But portions of the willow grove remained, cool and remote and peopled with memories.

Euan, when he saw where he was, almost hesitated to enter. He was afraid of disturbing his own small ghost which was so fond of playing there. But he need not have troubled. These small ghosts of childhood take no heed of us. They do not know us, nor do they care for what we are. It is we who are wistful, not they.

Some boys were splashing lower down where the stream made a pool beneath a bridge, but the willow grove was empty. The tap-tapping of an industrious high-hole sounded loudly in the quiet. Euan wiped the sweat from his forehead and sat down on a bank which had once been inches higher than his head. They had measured there, once, and Kathrine had been almost as tall as he — 'too tall

for a girl,' he had told her grandly. He could see her indignant face now, and remembered how her hair had been the soft, deep brown of the bank and her eyes like its shaded water, liquid light and shadow.

Slowly, as he sat there, yesterday drove out to-day. He remembered . . . and remembered . . . he was lost in memory. The little girl, Kathy, came so close and became so real that he could have accused himself of dreaming when he raised his eyes and saw the other Kathy only a few paces from him. The surprise in his eyes was fully answered by hers.

'I thought you were at the Rectory,' said Kathrine. She was noticeably ill at ease, a rare thing for her. And he thought — he was sure — she had been crying.

'I came for a walk,' said Euan stupidly.

'So did I. The garden at home was so hot. But it's not much cooler here. Cutting down the trees across the stream has made a difference.'

This was plainly an effort to sustain conversation — another thing Kathrine seldom did. He supposed that she did not want him to notice that she had been crying. And this was quite in line with the Kathy that he knew. The secret, frozen-faced woman who had looked at him for a moment beside the sagging gate was utterly gone. In her place stood a red-eyed girl, own sister to every weeping maiden since the world began. And seeing her thus, a miracle happened. Euan forgot that he was shy.

'Have a log?' he offered hospitably. 'That mossy one is nice. It's too hot to walk home yet awhile. And you look tired.'

Kathrine made no disclaimer, but sat down upon the indicated log without a word. To Euan's stern 'You've been crying,' she merely nodded.

'I suppose I am tired,' she said after a moment. 'The heat — and everything.'

Euan did not look at her. He was staring blankly into the water at his feet.

'I did not see Garry at the Rectory,' he murmured. 'But I saw Mr. Dwight. He told me about Garry going to England.'

'Yes?' said Kathrine.

'He implied that it was partly your idea. Do you want him to go, Kathy?'

'No,' said Kathrine.

It seemed impossible for her to say more than the monosyllables.

'Then why do you let him?'

'What?'

'Tell him to stay. He'll do anything you tell him to, like a shot. And glad to get the chance.'

He looked at her now and saw that the pupils of her eyes had expanded until they were almost black. There was a fresh tear just ready to fall, but some different emotion had halted it.

'Thanks,' said Kathrine, with a breathless little gasp of a laugh. 'I needed some one to say it, to see how absurd it was. And yet it is the kind of nonsense I've been torturing myself with. I have been saying over and over, "Tell him to stay — he will stay if you tell him" . . . Funny how just having him in the same town was something to hold to? . . . You'd think it would be just the opposite.'

'No, I shouldn't,' said Euan with conviction.

'I haven't seen him since — I mean he wrote me a note,' said Kathrine, 'and I told him I was glad he was going. But if he had been here a few moments ago I believe I would have begged — yes, begged! — him not to go. Would you think me the kind of girl to do that sort of thing?'

'Any kind of girl — anybody — does that sort of thing.'

'You wouldn't.'

'I'd wallow,' said Euan, 'simply wallow . . . if it would do any good,' he added as an afterthought.

'But, of course, it never does.'

'No,' said Euan.

There was a long pause and then Kathrine went on in a monotonous voice unlike her own:

'Nothing will do any good. It was a feeling of the uselessness of doing things that broke me down . . . I felt as if I would go mad just doing nothing . . . because there *is* nothing. It's all done, finished, final . . . if there was something to fight against it might be easier. Or even something to give up . . . one can give up, I think, and still keep . . . but there is nothing. Never was.'

Euan flicked a stone into the water and watched the ripples.

'Is it possible for a man to believe he loves a girl and not to love her, Euan?'

'No,' said Euan, 'it isn't. Not *love*.'

Kathrine considered this a moment. 'But if one didn't quite know what love was,' she mused, 'one might do it . . . I don't see how else it could have happened . . . it wasn't as if I had looked for it in the first place. I didn't, Euan. Truly, I didn't. I was happy in being just a friend . . . if he had gone back to college like that I would have missed him greatly . . . but not unhappily . . . So it isn't as if I had — had wanted to make it happen . . . It came unexpectedly and I did not question it. You can see that, can't you?'

'Yes,' said Euan.

'The odd thing,' went on Kathrine — for the relief of unaccustomed confession was so great that it robbed her of self-consciousness — 'the odd thing is that now I seem to have been questioning all the time, except at the very first. It confuses me. But it does seem, looking back, that, save for those first days, I was never completely sure . . . his letters . . . I would not see anything in them except what I wanted to see . . . but they never satisfied. Is it possible that we can both know and not know at the same time?'

'Sounds difficult. But as it happens all the time, perhaps one part of us knows what the other part doesn't. Or there may be different ways of knowing.'

'Yes, there must be. When Garry came back and was so careful and kind, I wasn't happy. I wouldn't admit it, but I couldn't be quite blind. Then an explanation grew up in my own mind. I told myself that it was the Church that Garry loved. That he regretted his old decision to belong to that other life utterly. I thought I saw the struggle —'

'Oh, I expect he struggled all right,' said Euan dryly.

'Yes. But you see I thought he struggled to subdue his love for me, while all the time the real effort was to keep up the pretence of loving. And the rival whom I thought was God, turned out to be my sister . . . It has its humorous side,' she laughed, shortly.

'Please, don't!' said Euan.

'You guessed, didn't you? that it was Gilda?'

'Yes.'

'I don't feel jealous yet. Do you suppose I shall?'

'You may,' cautiously.

'But I thought people always did right away.'

'People don't always do anything.'

'I am beginning to realize that . . . I think it is cool enough to go home now.'

'Your face is streaked,' said Euan critically. 'Wait a moment —' From his pocket he produced two handkerchiefs (Janet insisted upon two) and, dipping one in the water, proceeded in a business-like manner to remove the streaks.

'This is where I get even for all the times you washed my face for me when I was young and helpless,' he said cheerfully. 'There, that's better,' he concluded.

'Thanks. Is my hair all right?'

'There's a leaf sticking in it, over the right ear, but — oh, Kathy, please — it's awful to see you cry!'

'I'm not — exactly. But it's hard to stop when one's got started. And I'm not really crying this time. It's just that it's — rather nice to have told some one. To have a friend.'

With a wavering smile she picked the leaf out of her hair and scrambled up. Euan, a damp handkerchief in either hand, tried awkwardly to help her. But when she stood beside him, he made no movement to go. Rather he stood there, thoughtful, blocking the path. He was a large young man, though not so big as Con. The sun, behind him, outlined broad shoulders, long limbs, and rumpled hair. His eyes, which were blue like his father's, were deeply serious as they met her inquiring gaze. Kathrine, who had always thought of Euan as younger than herself, recognized suddenly that he was the older. A new nervousness pricked through her.

'I'm going now,' she said again.

And still he did not stand aside.

'I'm thinking,' he said, 'that perhaps I'd better tell you.'

'Tell me what?'

'That I'm not a friend.'

'Oh, Euan — don't.'

'I've got to,' firmly. 'Besides, you know it, don't you? The friendship part was all right when we were children, but ever since we grew up it has been different. I did not know it myself at first. Not that it would have mattered. Please, don't look like that. I wouldn't have it otherwise for all the world. And I am not asking anything. Not the slightest thing. Only we have always been so straight with each other, I wanted to keep it that way. You won't let what I've said make any difference?'

'I don't know,' said Kathrine, shaken.

'Why should you? I haven't changed. I am just like I was yesterday and the day before and every day since I grew up. I loved you before I knew what love was. I don't know what love is yet. But I am finding out new things all

the time. I've found out a lot to-day. But one thing I'm sure of — it isn't friendship.'

'I wanted a friend.'

'You might try Con,' suggested Euan.

'I wanted you.'

'You have me.'

'As a friend?'

Euan shook his head. 'But, I say,' he conceded generously, 'you can call me that if you like. It doesn't matter as long as you know differently.'

Kathrine threw up her head with an uncertain laugh.

'Oh — you're impossible!' she exclaimed.

'I'm not much good at pretending,' he admitted, and stood aside to let her pass.

At the edge of the willows she paused and turned to him with a ghost of her old delightful smile.

'I'll tell you what they tell me, Euan,' she said. 'You're young. You will get over it — in time.'

'All right!' said Euan. 'I'll tell you when I do. Is that a bargain?'

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

GILDA was having a most unsatisfactory day. From the moment of her early return in the morning, everything and everybody conspired to be consistently annoying. To begin with, Lucia took the trivial episode of the swamp with a quite disconcerting seriousness. Through her disturbed eyes, Gilda saw, for the first time, how worse than uncomfortable would be her position should news of the escapade filter through to Blencarrow.

‘But nobody knows,’ argued Gilda. ‘So how can it possibly filter through? Con won’t speak, none of us will speak, and no one else can. I did not meet a soul who knew me coming home — until I ran into Father at the gate, and —’

Lucia turned so white at this that Gilda paused in surprise.

‘You met your father at the gate?’ Lucia’s tongue stumbled over the words as if it found them difficult to form.

‘Why — yes. But it doesn’t matter, does it? He was drunk, of course.’ Gilda never indulged in euphemism, when speaking of her father.

‘Tell me exactly what happened,’ Lucia commanded briefly.

Gilda told her — all except the slight push of her elbow which it was really not necessary to mention. ‘When he tried to move, he fell down,’ she finished. ‘I had to step over him. He may be there yet for all I know.’ She was willing to laugh at the incident now. But Lucia persisted in being unaccountably upset.

‘And you say he knew where you had been?’ she questioned sternly.

‘He said “Swamp mud!” — but it was only a guess.’

‘It was a correct guess,’ said Lucia, ‘and — dangerous.’

'But surely Father's guesses do not count?'

'If he happens to guess the truth —'

'But,' impatiently, 'you know what he is like! He will have forgotten all about it by now.'

'Perhaps.' Lucia tried to speak more lightly, but the effort was too obvious to be reassuring.

It seemed, to Gilda, that an immense amount of fuss was being made over a little thing. Yet, absurd as the idea of danger might seem, the danger itself was not absurd. Gilda knew very well that the popular mind, already harrowed by the dance at the Festival, lay open and ready for the planting of any seed of scandal. And scandal was such a stupid thing! Only very inexperienced people lay themselves open to scandal. A touch of the unusual, a bit of social daring, perhaps, something to make folk talk and wonder? But scandal — no.

'If you think he is likely to say anything, we will have to stop it,' she told her mother firmly.

'How?' asked Lucia.

The helplessness of this reply frightened Gilda. And anger being the first reaction to fear, she spoke sharply.

'Surely you can manage it? Hasn't he done me enough injury already?' Her soft face changed and hardened and her eyes grew cold and remote. 'I understood that if I came home I was to be protected from his crazy whims.'

Lucia turned away without reply and, with one of her lightning changes, Gilda sprang to her, prettily repentant.

'I didn't mean it, Mumsy! Of course, it's not your fault he is so horrid' (this was very gracious). 'And, honestly, I believe he was too fuddled to remember. So don't worry. And when Con calls, be sure to act as if the whole thing were of no consequence. Just be gently surprised that he should have felt it necessary to come at all.'

Con arrived, as he had said he would, during the morning. And Gilda, following her policy of indifference, was not

present at the interview. This did not mean, however, that she did not know all about it. Gilda had no ridiculous scruples about eavesdropping, in a righteous cause. But this time, in accordance with the proverbial fate of listeners, what she heard did not please her. Lucia did not play up to form, for one thing. She began with the fine detachment recommended by Gilda, but, under Con's grave and matter-of-fact sympathy, weakly broke down and showed her anxiety without reserve. She even told Con about the meeting with Gilbert at the gate and Con did not pooh-pooh the matter as Gilda had thought he would. Instead he said gravely:

'It is most unfortunate that he should have seen her. If she had taken my advice and gone to Aunt's first, it need not have happened.' (Was his voice a trifle louder as he said this? The listener bit her lips at the implication.)

'Gilda thinks that he will forget all about it,' said Lucia. 'And she may be right. He came in shortly after she did and has been lying down ever since.'

'Are you sure?' asked Con. 'Because —'

'Yes?' prompted Lucia as he hesitated.

'Because I thought I saw him in the garden as I came in.' They looked at each other with a new uneasiness.

'One never knows where he is,' said Lucia in a half whisper.

'He did not speak to me. Perhaps he did not see me at all,' comforted Con. And then, changing the subject, he asked after Kathrine and appeared to forget that her sister existed. His attitude all through was that of a family friend who restores an unruly child to its proper guardian — sympathetic, understanding, but not unduly concerned.

Gilda did not like it at all.

She liked it still less when, before he left, he made occasion to draw Kathrine aside and to talk to her seriously, just out of the range of Gilda's hearing. So keen was her curiosity

that she asked Kathrine, later, what they had talked about. But Kathrine answered carelessly, 'Nothing much.'

Gilda was surprised at Kathrine. She had expected an elder-sister lecture at the very least. But Kathrine was quite noticeably absorbed in her own affairs. Gilda's recital had left her unmoved. She had listened absently, made few comments, and definitely cut short further discussion by leaving the room to fix the gate which Gilbert's collapse had once more loosed from its hinges. Gilda saw her talking to Euan, and later, after Con had been and gone, had watched her take her hat and leave the house with no explanation save the inadequate one of going for a walk.

No wonder the prodigal felt ill used. And it was cleaning day, too! Once a month Mrs. Yamen, Blencarrow's much-sought-after 'daily help,' gave the Fenwells the benefit of her assistance. She never missed her day and never changed it. Gilda, as she spread her cushions in the shade of the shrubbery, could see her cleaning the sitting-room windows. That meant that she was nearly through, for the sitting-room windows always came last.

The ill-used one sank back on her cushions with a martyred sigh. There would be time for a cat-nap before supper. But even this small satisfaction was denied her. For Mrs. Yamen began to sing.

*'A few more years shall roll (she sang),
A few more seasons come,
And we shall be with those who rest
A—sleep with—in the tomb.'*

It was a very slow hymn and very long and Mrs. Yamen sang it lingeringly, introducing grace notes at appropriate intervals. Gilda shut her eyes tightly and tried to close her ears. But it was no use. Even a cat-nap refused to oblige. And no sooner had the songstress ceased than the gate clicked and Kathrine's voice promised new disturbance.

Gilda sat up on her heels and, peering through the bushes, received an unexpected shock.

Kathrine had been crying!

Her eyes were distinctly red (Kathrine, Gilda remembered, could never cry artistically). What could have happened? Something rather important, Gilda thought, since it had broken through the cold restraint so familiar to her family since the night of the Festival. Besides, in spite of her eyes, Kathy looked more like herself than she had done for weeks. Gilda's curiosity flamed.

'Come in for a moment, Con,' she heard Kathrine say. 'I want you to take —'

What she wanted him to take was lost to Gilda who was for the moment deafened by an inward clamour. Her startled mind could scarcely guess that this second meeting had been merely a chance encounter at the gate — far more natural to conclude that the two had been together all afternoon. Gilda's anger was sure of it. And Gilda's jealousy seethed.

Of what use now to pretend that she cared nothing for Conway de Beck? Of what use to tell herself that he was an awkward youth whom, already, she had ceased to find amusing? The sight of his dark, strong head bent deferentially toward Kathrine was enough to send all these flimsy affectations to the winds. He was her man . . . she wanted him!

The girl rose from her kneeling posture and smoothed her hair disordered by the bushes. She tried to smooth her thoughts, too. Always she had been able to do this. It was the secret of that maturity in her which an onlooker found so puzzling. The power to reflect coolly and to act surely in trying situations had solved many a problem for Gilda.

But this was different. To her dismay she found that this was very different. It was so different that it wasn't the same at all . . . she couldn't think . . . she felt!

And her present feeling was a driving and consuming

curiosity to know what Con was saying to Kathrine. She was up from her cushions and behind the shrubbery with no more disturbance than a bird alighting on a bough. But Con and Kathrine, as if directed by a perverse fate, walked slowly on, and, after an undecided pause, sat down upon the doorstep.

Gilda could not hear a word. Neither would it be possible to hear, unseen, from inside the house. The only likely place where hearing and safety might be combined was the door in the wall above which no one ever opened — if she were there and the door ajar, even a trifle, she could listen at her pleasure.

Still lightly as a bird that flies upon its own important business, Gilda left the shrubbery and stepped unseen around the side of the house to the back door, through the kitchen to the stairs, and by the stairs to the upper hall.

The door was locked as it always was, but Gilda knew where the key was kept. The memory came back from childhood. The key hung high above the highest shelf in the tall clothes closet off the hall. She remembered having tried to climb up to it when she was little, for the resulting fall had impressed the fact upon her mind. Her mother's agitation, too, had added to the unusualness of the occasion, and the repeated warnings never, never to touch the key had lent the door a Bluebeard interest, promptly dispelled the next time Mrs. Yamen had opened the mysterious portal to clean the glass on the outside.

Mrs. Yamen, Gilda knew, had strict injunctions about both door and key. She was a small woman and had to stand on a chair to replace the latter. Gilda had often watched her do it, hopeful that one day the chair might overbalance. But Mrs. Yamen was a provokingly careful person.

All this fuss and care, Gilda understood, without being exactly told, was on account of Father. There was danger for Father if the key were left in the lock. And this know-

ledge lent a further interest to Mrs. Yamen's movements. Because, if Mrs. Yamen were ever to forget the key, it might be exciting to see what would happen — to Father. But Mrs. Yamen never did.

The clothes closet did not seem half so high now as it had then. Gilda reached the key quite easily by placing one foot upon the lowest shelf and pulling herself up by the highest. It turned smoothly in the lock and the door opened without effort. Gilda, sitting on the floor, placed a cautious ear to the opening . . . she could hear everything beautifully!

Kathrine was saying in a hesitating voice, 'I don't know, Con. I hope so. But I think — I am almost certain — that you will have to wait.'

Then Con's voice, earnest, confident: 'Well — I am a good waiter.'

That was all. That, incredibly, was all! The two shook hands and parted without another word.

After all her trouble!

Incredulous, Gilda opened the door still farther and looked out. Con's long strides had already carried him to the curve in the pathway. For a second he paused and looked around. Gilda drew back so quickly that the sleeve of her green dress caught on the climbing rose and tore — a long, jagged tear with a piece out of the middle. Surely a fitting end to an annoying day.

In the back kitchen, Mrs. Yamen, getting ready for home, was singing dolorously.

*'A few more struggles here,
A few more partings o'er —'*

Gilda closed the door, resisting, with the last shred of her self-control, the temptation to bang it, and retired to her own room where anger and chagrin might be indulged in undisturbed. As for the key in the lock, what is a key, more or less, to a girl as badgered as Gilda? She forgot it entirely.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE day which had been so disappointing to Gilda had been a good day, as days go, for Gilbert Fenwell. The small excitement of meeting his daughter at the gate, under circumstances promising much future entertainment, had quite bucked him up. Even the experience of having been flung down and walked over was all to the good, since it showed plainly that his intuitional gibe 'Swamp mud!' had got home.

The 'red-haired one' had been in the swamp. The red-haired one had been out all night. This was all his brain accepted at first, but, later, some undestroyed association linked up the swamp with Con . . . Con the young sprig who brought furs to other people's wives — who picked people up by the coat collar as if they were unfit to touch . . . The red-haired one had been in the swamp with Con! . . . How would her finicky mother like that?

So stimulated was Gilbert that he actually managed to keep awake until Con's arrival, and observation of his earnest conference with Lucia had made suspicion certainty. He had not spoken to the young man — had pretended not to see him. A very large young man is better left alone even by outraged fathers. But one's own family is a different matter. A man is master in his own house. There are things which fathers can do and should do . . . inalienable rights . . . parental discipline. Gilbert rolled the phrases over with a sly smile.

There must be no undue haste. Suspense is an excellent weapon. He had used it before. A nice idea might be to explain to Lucia what he intended doing — duties of a father and all that — and then to keep her waiting. It was a long time since he had done this. He had been slack. His women

were getting out of hand — treating him with an indifference which (when he thought of it) made his blood boil. The trouble was that he forgot so easily — things, grievances even, slipped away. He must remedy that.

When had he last seen fear in his wife's eyes? It seemed a long time. He had been careless of late, disinclined to assert himself. Lucia, no doubt, fancied him done for . . . all the better sport for that. He'd show her!

But he must be careful. No muddling. His brain was very clear to-day. He knew exactly what to do. The possibility of wife-baiting had enlivened him wonderfully. And he fully realized the value of the weapon fate had placed in his hands. Lucia had always been foolish over the red-haired one. The only time she had ever beaten him had been when she sent the red-haired one away . . . deprived her of a father's oversight. And what was the result? Gilbert rubbed his hands gleefully as he considered the result. And except for that chance encounter at the gate he might never have known of it! . . . But he had her now — oh, undoubtedly he had her now! . . . Walk over him, would she? Stamp him into the mud? High and mighty, pretty miss, high and mighty! . . . But he had her now . . . he had her now!

With these pleasant meditations uppermost, Gilbert waited until Con had gone and Kathrine too, and then, forceful and confident, went in to Lucia.

'I would like a word with you, my dear,' he said, and sat down.

Lucia grew very still. She knew what was coming. There was hardly even the shock of surprise. This moment had lain in wait for her from the moment she had placed her first kiss upon the baby Gilda's lips. She had fought it off, eluded it, defied it, and of late had dreamed a futile dream of escape. But one never escaped. She should have known that.

'It is about our daughter Gilda,' went on Gilbert. His

voice, very near her ear, sank to a whisper. This whispering was a torment which he had always reserved for their intimate moments. Even Kathrine, who had been spared little, knew nothing of this. Always, since the evil in him had taken the upper hand, it had been his custom to sit beside Lucia thus and whisper in her ear. What those whisperings were, no one save Lucia knew. She had never prayed to be delivered from them because of a vague hope that God did not know either. But, for herself, she was bound. Useless, for her, to attempt to escape them . . . useless to try not to listen . . . useless to try to forget. He was very skilful. Her mind was his. All he had to do was to whisper . . . useless not to listen . . . useless to hope to forget! . . .

Gilbert saw from the first moment that he had her again. That waiting stillness told him: the look in her eyes. It was a tonic like the finest wine. His old skill came back . . . thought he was done for, did she? He'd show her!

When he had finished, he left her sitting there, her neglected sewing in her lap. She seemed quieter than usual. There was a blank look in her eyes . . . odd, that, but quite satisfactory. She hadn't quite realized yet. But she would.

He decided to get a bit of sleep. Now that he had whispered himself out, he felt dull. A little sleep would bring back the lucidity. He must be careful not to sleep too long . . . or to forget. This forgetting was the very devil. Better wake up in time for supper. It would be stimulating to face his family at the table and to toy with the weapon ready to his hand. Afterward, when he was comfortable at the North American and had had a drink or two, he would decide at his leisure upon the next step . . . something exciting . . . dramatic . . . This damned town must be made to realize that Gilbert Fenwell was himself again. Master in his own home. He'd show them!

But the supper was a disappointment. They were there, the three of them. But, somehow, *he* didn't seem to be

there. It was a curious feeling. He had had it several times before, and he didn't like it. Usually, when it came on, he sat quietly somewhere until it had worn off. To-night he tried to ignore it, to pretend it didn't exist. Several times he attempted to say things which would make Lucia look at him as she had looked that morning and to bring back the feeling of power he had felt then. But he couldn't think of the right things to say. He stammered. Lucia did not look at him at all. And her not looking made him fear more than ever that he wasn't there. Every one was very silent. Kathrine, who occasionally spoke to him directly, sat with her eyes on her plate, saying little and that at random. The red-haired one talked to her mother only, ate but little supper, and slipped away from the table. He tried to be offensive about this, muttering that he knew who was waiting for her in the garden. But he couldn't have made himself intelligible, for neither Lucia nor Kathrine paid any attention. . . . Wait, though! — he wasn't so sure about Lucia either. She had a strange look — blank. An inward look . . . not fear, though. He'd rather it had been fear.

Strange, too, how when they turned his way, her eyes seemed to look through him. He glanced behind him uneasily. What if he really were not there? What if he only thought he was there? He brought his hand down heavily upon the table to see if the china would rattle. But next moment he couldn't be sure whether it had rattled or not. He felt the chair upon which he sat. That, at least, seemed solid. But he had known chairs to seem solid that weren't . . .

What he needed was a drink. Once he was comfortable at the North American, this strange feeling would pass. His mind would be clear again. He would be able to think things out. He rose cautiously from the table and announced his intention of going out. No one seemed interested . . . most disrespectful . . . quite out of hand . . . but they didn't

know, yet . . . they didn't know what he was going to do . . . master in his own house . . . they didn't know that!

When he had gone, Kathrine looked at her mother with a sigh of relief.

'He is harmless enough to-night,' she said.

But Lucia said nothing. Her face, which had been so lined with fresh anxiety in the morning, had settled into a pale immobility that was almost peace. Kathrine wondered at it. But, then, she often wondered at Lucia.

At the North American, Gilbert found things considerably better. A drink or two made a big difference. The bucked up feeling came back — a sense of his power as a male and a Fenwell. He tested it by saying to a crony that women were the very devil . . . never knew, did you? what a woman would do? . . . 'cept that you knew there wasn't anything she wouldn't . . . The last word of this sounded contradictory, so he explained that what he meant was not that she wouldn't, but that she would . . . that there wasn't anything . . . not a thing . . . that a woman wouldn't . . . or would . . . y' understand?

Despairing of getting this really clear, he proceeded to tell of some things which he, Gilbert Fenwell, had known women to do . . . colourful stories these . . . spicy . . . only he kept getting the women mixed, and quarrelled with himself over which woman did that, in a way which wasted much time. And he hadn't time to waste. He wanted to get on to the main story . . . the one of the little red-haired devil who knocked her own father down at his own gate and walked over him . . . make 'em sit up, that story would! . . . But he didn't want to tell it too soon . . . keep it for a climax . . . regular knock-out . . . See?

After a long time, or no time at all, depending on how you looked at it, Gilbert glanced up and saw the night watchman Duffy putting his head in at the door. The whole of

the morning's humiliation came back with a rush. He remembered clearly. Old Duffy had been there . . . he had seen it all! . . . Well, now he would see something else . . . he would see how he, Gilbert Fenwell, dealt with his insulters . . . yes, sir! . . . walk over him, would she? Trample him in the mud? . . . Ah, but that mud was sweet beside the mud in which he would trample her!

With drunken gravity he arose. The loungers looked at him curiously. He was amusing at times.

'What I want t' say,' he declared in a loud whisper, 'what I want t' say is red hair is t' devil . . . no . . . what I meanta shay is — out she goes! . . . yes, sir . . . out she goes! . . . what I meanta shay is — out she goes!'

It didn't sound as impressive as he had hoped. He seemed to leave out some details. Some one threw him a question, but he didn't follow it. Only one thing seemed clear. He had, by a long train of intensive thinking, come upon the thing he sought — his whole duty as a father and a Fenwell.

Hadn't he just said it? They had all heard him say it . . . 'Put her out' . . . that was what he had to do . . . the House of Fenwell must be purged . . . erring daughter . . . incorrigible . . . father's duty . . . How'd they like that? Those women that laughed at him? . . . How'd they like that . . . eh?

'It's time ye were awa' hame,' said Mr. Duffy, coming all the way in.

Gilbert drained his glass, set it down with a jerk, and nodded loftily.

'Muss go now,' he agreed. 'Waited too long as 'tis . . . honour of t' Fenwells . . . do what mus' be done . . . yes . . . what I wanta shay is — out she goes!'

He walked more or less steadily from the bar. Mr. Duffy, watching him, scratched his head. Should he go with him? No, on the whole, he thought it unnecessary. Gilbert seemed a bit steadier than usual. No need to trail along — with another sharp storm blowing up.

'Who's Gilbert going to put out?' asked one of the loungers idly.

The bar-tender shrugged his shoulders, and raising his finger rotated it rapidly above his right ear. 'Wheels!' he said laconically.

The loungers laughed.

Gilbert walked directly home. The wind was rising, but it blew him against a lamp-post only once. Watching him, one might have thought him sober — almost. For himself he was sure of it. Sober he was, and full of stern purpose. The whole situation lay plain before him. A daughter of his, a Fenwell, had forgotten herself. She had disgraced her home, her father, the spotless Fenwell name. He, Gilbert, always indulgent, but not to be trifled with, had become aware of this disgrace . . . it remained for him to do his duty. His duty was . . . his duty was . . . oh, yes, he remembered now, his duty was to cast her out . . . Had he not promised before all the people? . . . 'Put her out!' he had said . . . and he was going home now to do it.

There would be sport with Lucia. Couldn't say a word, though . . . everything on his side . . . Church, State . . . Bible . . . what did the Bible say? . . . 'Rescue the —' . . . no, that wasn't it. Something about children . . . 'Suffer little —' . . . no, no, not that either . . . he couldn't remember what it was, but it was hot stuff . . . Lucia couldn't say a word . . . father's rights . . . Church and State . . .

It was plain to Gilbert now that all along his fault, if he had a fault, had been a too-complacent attitude. How he had indulged these women! . . . Great mistake to indulge women . . . keep 'em to heel . . . if he hadn't indulged Lucia he'd have been a man of property to-day . . . Lucia had stopped the house, hadn't she? Yes, she had . . . silly excuse . . . something about not enough money . . . but she had money. All the Danverses had money, hadn't they? . . . why

had he, Gilbert, given in? . . . weak, very weak . . . Well, he would take a strong stand now . . . That house, the finest house in Blencarrow, must be finished . . . He'd get the men at it to-morrow . . . all the men Lucia had sent away . . . no, to-night . . . he'd get the men at it to-night. No time like the present . . .

It wouldn't take long to finish the house. There wasn't a great deal to do . . . finishing touches . . . paint . . . the inside was already finished . . . they had placed the grand piano in the drawing-room and the big easy-chairs on either side of the fireplace . . . only the veranda wasn't quite ready . . . or was it? . . . why, of course it was. He had planted the Virginia creeper at its corner last week. Another year or so and it would drape the balcony of the second story . . . fiery red in autumn, very striking . . . That balcony on the second story had been his own idea . . . that and the large single room extending across the front of the house . . . his bedroom . . . his and Lucia's, whether she liked it or not . . . no more nonsense! . . . It would be pleasant sleeping there to-night. The long windows could be left open even if it rained because the balcony protected them . . . his idea . . .

It was at this point that the wind blew him against the lamp-post and part of the lovely vision fled. He had a curious feeling of being in two worlds at once. Questions troubled him . . . why had he slept in that side room over the sitting-room for so long? . . . Lucia's doings? . . . What was it she always said about the big front room? . . . He couldn't remember . . . but she did not want him to go in there . . . tried to keep him out . . . locked the door . . . why had he never opened it? . . . because . . . because . . . no, he couldn't remember why he had never opened it . . . But he was going to take a stand now . . . find that key . . . master in his own house! . . .

He staggered through the gate under the lilacs . . . strange that the house door didn't seem to be in the right place . . .

carelessness! . . . but he got in. The stairs were not exactly where they should have been . . . he would have to be careful of the stairs . . . better not make a noise . . . There was a light in the upper hall . . . the women were all asleep . . . asleep in the beautiful home he had built for them . . . that showed you! Asleep, and didn't know nor care whether he, Gilbert Fenwell, were in or not . . . selfish? . . . he'd show them!

But it was better not to make a noise! Sitting down on the lowest step, Gilbert took off his shoes. It was difficult to get up again. But he managed it, a man doesn't have to sleep on the stairs when he has a fine, large room, with a balcony, ready for him.

Wait, now!

What was it that he had come home to do? . . . Wait! . . . Something about putting her out . . . yes . . . honour of the family . . . but who? What family? . . . The Fenwell family? . . . yes, of course, the Fenwell family . . . he was Gilbert Fenwell, wasn't he? Gilbert Fenwell, financier.

He grabbed the balustrade and stood upright. He assumed an air. Things were straightening out at last. He knew who he was . . . Gilbert Fenwell, successful financier, man who made Blencarrow, man who built the Fenwell house . . . 'Our finest city residence, sir' . . . Gilbert Fenwell, coming home . . . going upstairs . . . see the red Turkey carpet? . . . Going along the hall . . . see the rich woodwork? . . . Gilbert Fenwell's idea . . . See, the glass door at the end of the passage? Door of Gilbert Fenwell's room . . . Locked? Certainly not! . . . Stopped all that nonsense long ago . . . Yes, sir . . . had to take a stand . . . only way to manage women . . . only way to . . .

Gilbert Fenwell's hand, carelessly authoritative, fell upon the doorknob. It turned easily. The door opened — no lights? . . . out of hand, all of them! . . . he'd show them! . . .

Gilbert Fenwell, master in his own house, walked proudly into the room that wasn't there.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

WHAT was that?

Kathrine, sharply awakened, sat up in bed, listening. The echo of a sudden sound was in her ears. Had a door banged? Or was the echo an echo from her dream — a confused, miserable dream through which she had endlessly pursued a figure whose face she could not see.

The wind, which had been steadily rising all night, was blowing now in fierce gusts; handfuls of rain, first heralds of the storm, flung themselves against the windows. The curtains streamed ghostlike, the blind was flapping like a captured bird.

But what door could have banged? Kathrine had closed all the doors before going to bed. A catch must have broken somewhere — or perhaps her father had come in, leaving the front door open?

Knowing that further sleep would be impossible until she found out, Kathrine, with a resentful sigh, thrust her feet into slippers and padded sleepily to her door. Although the noise, if noise it were, had probably awakened her mother, she might be in time to prevent her rising. But evidently her moments of listening had been longer than she thought. Lucia was already in the hallway. By the dim night light, left burning in a bracket, Kathrine saw her, tall and grey in her dressing-gown, one hand resting on the handle of the locked door.

‘What banged, Mother?’

‘A door, I think.’

Lucia’s voice was thick as if with sleep and she raised her hand to her eyes as if to brush away a film. The girl felt a thrill of anxiety. At supper and all the evening her mother had been unlike herself, strange, remote. And now, even in

the dim light, Kathrine could see the flush upon her cheekbones.

'It could not have been this door,' said Kathrine reasonably; 'locked doors can't bang.'

'No,' said Lucia.

But she moved her hand, and Kathrine, following the motion, saw what had before escaped her — the key was in the lock.

'Was it open?' she asked, puzzled.

'It was unlocked,' said Lucia.

'Then the noise did come from here . . . how frightfully careless!'

Crossing to the door, Kathrine took the handle from her mother's hesitating grasp and turned it, tentatively. The door, with the pressure of the wind behind it, opened with a disconcerting suddenness. Almost, it was torn from her hand. The night met her like a wet blanket slapped across the face.

'No wonder it banged!' she exclaimed. 'What a beast of a night!' Then, when the door was safely shut again, 'Who had the key last, do you know?'

Lucia said nothing. She still seemed hardly awake. Kathrine touched her arm gently.

'It is all right, anyway,' she reassured her. 'Go back to bed, Mother. No harm has been done. But we shall have to speak to Gilda. She is too careless.'

'Gilda?' As usual Lucia responded instantly to the magic word, but her voice was vague, 'What has Gilda to do with it?'

'Nothing, perhaps. But it's between Gilda and Mrs. Yamen. And you know how careful Mrs. Yamen is.'

'Mrs. Yamen?' again Lucia repeated the words. 'Oh, yes, I remember, she was cleaning yesterday.'

'Mother! What's the matter? You are half asleep still. Do go to bed. And if you take my advice you'll have this

door nailed up, whether Father likes it or not. It's dangerous. Some one is sure to forget it sometime.'

'Yes,' said Lucia. She let Kathrine urge her gently back to her room.

'You won't lie awake listening for Father, will you?' coaxed the girl.

'No,' promised Lucia docilely.

'I'll go downstairs and see that everything's all right.'

'Don't go down,' said Lucia.

'Why?'

Lucia appeared to consider. 'You might take cold,' she said.

Kathrine smiled indulgently. 'All right,' she answered. 'I'll not go farther than the head of the stairs. I can see from there. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' said Lucia, closing her door.

'She'll be ill after this,' thought Kathrine unhappily. 'Yesterday was too much. Gilda ought to be shaken soundly.'

For the moment she felt inclined to wake her sister and impress upon her a few home truths, but as she looked into Gilda's room the sight of her so soundly and healthily asleep was too much for her resolution. To-morrow would do. What a charmingly pretty thing she was! Kathrine thought of Con's confidences in the garden and smiled. If any one could manage Gilda, it was Con . . .

Well, thank goodness, nothing had happened! She decided to let Gilda wait until morning — especially as the hall grew chilly. Going to the head of the stairs, as she had promised, she looked down. The door below was closed, the hall empty. No sprawling figure lay upon the stairs. Gilbert, she decided, had not come in — would probably not return that night at all. There was nothing unusual in this. Shivering a little in the draught from the back window, Kathrine went back to bed.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE midnight storm, though sharp, did not last long and the morning air was pale wine cupped in crystal. Euan was astir even earlier than he had promised. With a heart which persisted in being as light as the air, he collected materials for his mending operations and set out for the Fenwell gate. Birds, even earlier than he, splashed in shallow pools. The woods smelt sweet — all the dead dust of summer conjured back to fragrant earth again — a lovely coolness breathed upon the newborn day.

The gate, he discovered, was in a bad way. The last remaining screw of the top hinge had come out altogether, and the gate leant back against the lilac behind it in a way which suggested the abandonment of hope. Euan removed the lower hinge, and proceeded to plug the holes in workman-like fashion. From where he worked, the curve in the path shut out the view of the front door and lower portion of the house. But he could see the upper windows with their open shutters and their curtains swelling gently in the breeze.

He glanced at the McCorquodale house. No one was stirring there yet and the gate was almost finished. He could slip away before a soul had seen him . . . But no . . . a lean, white horse with clumping hoofs was coming around the corner — Jake Haskins with the milk. But Kathy wouldn't mind Jake Haskins. Kathy and Euan had gone to public school with Jake.

'Mornin', Euan,' said Mr. Haskins agreeably. 'Say, did you get up or stay up?' Jake's hard destiny in life being to rise before his fellows, he had decided to make a virtue of necessity, and to assume a lofty air of tolerance for more ordinary mortals.

'Hello, Jake,' said Euan. 'Here, hang on to this gate while I get the first screw in.'

Jake, obliging, hung on. 'Bout time this here gate was gettin' fixed,' he remarked severely; 'often felt like tacklin' it myself.'

'Too bad you didn't.'

'Well, when a fellow gets up every morning at half-past four — hi! Betsy, whoa!'

Betsy, having allowed the usual time for milk delivery, was moving on. 'Stubbornest mare you ever saw!' exclaimed Jake. 'Hi, Betsy!'

'You'll wake up the McCorquodales,' warned Euan; 'there, that's all — thanks.'

'You're welcome,' said Jake. 'Mind you give it plenty of play offen the ground. If I'd been fixin' it, I'd have set it an inch higher.' Picking up his cans, he disappeared up the path . . .

Euan, gathering his tools, heard the milk cans clatter as their owner dropped them. But as Jake was clumsy and the path was wet, it did not disturb him. Not until Jake's face, whiter than his own milk, blundered through the lilac bushes, did he scent tragedy.

'I say!' stammered Jake. 'Oh, I say — come here! Old Gilbert's done for himself!'

'Rot,' said Euan, succinctly.

'Dead,' said Jake. 'Dead as ducks, in his own front yard!'

'Dead drunk, you mean,' said Euan sharply. 'Don't be a fool, Jake.'

'Maybe,' said Jake. 'But — you go first and see.'

Euan needed no urging. He was not alarmed, only angry. But at the first sight of that sprawling figure in the open space before the door, he knew that the milkman's instinct had not deceived him. It was a dead man who lay there.

'He is dead, Jake,' said Euan in a startled voice. 'Get Dr. Bryce, will you? Never mind the milk.'

'Guess I'm the first to find him,' said Jake with fearful pride. 'But ain't you a doctor yourself, Euan?'

'No, not a qualified one. Hurry, Jake. Tell the doctor he'd better 'phone Jones, too.'

'Why, you don't think — you don't reckon you'll need the police, do you, Euan?'

'I don't know what we'll need. But the police ought to be told. He hasn't died naturally, that's sure.'

'Oh, I say — will you and me be accessories?'

'You'll be the whole thing if you don't hurry up.'

'I'm going, Euan — oh, I *say!*'

The last exclamation was wrung from him by direst dismay, for at that moment the house door opened and Lucia Fenwell's face looked out.

'I heard voices,' said Lucia quietly. 'What is it, Euan?'

'An accident,' stammered Euan. His instinct was to hide the dreadful figure from her for a moment. 'Your husband —'

'My husband?' repeated Lucia, as if she found the words odd. Then, with an obvious effort to be properly interested, 'Is he ill?'

'No, it's not that,' said Euan. With a slight hesitation, he stood aside. She could see the heap of clothes now . . . She did see it . . . her hand fluttered to her lips . . .

'Is that Gilbert?' she asked timidly.

'Yes,' said Euan.

Lucia closed the house door and stood for a moment looking down with a sort of impersonal wonder at the body on the grass. She wore a straight print wrapper, hurriedly slipped on, and her hair, still luxuriant, waved unconfined from its central parting and hung in a loose plait down her back. She looked younger than Euan had ever seen her.

'He looks strange like that, doesn't he?' she said in a conversational tone. And then, slowly, as if under strong compulsion, she knelt to lift the nerveless hand.

At the touch of it she started.

'It's cold,' she said in a flat tone; adding, 'It's very cold. That means that he is dead — doesn't it?'

Euan nodded, wondering.

'Quite dead,' said Lucia. 'Will you help me carry him in, Euan?'

Her composure, Euan thought, was marvellous. If she could only keep it up until the doctor came! He glanced anxiously toward the gate. But there was no help in sight yet.

'We can't,' he said. 'I mean — it seems to have been an accident of some sort. His leg and arm are broken and there may be other injuries. Though I cannot be sure that they killed him. We must not move him until Dr. Bryce comes — please, Mrs. Fenwell, let me take you in — let me call Kathy — let me —'

'No,' said Lucia. She did not rise from the wet grass and her composure still held. 'An accident?' she repeated. 'What kind of accident?'

'I don't know,' said Euan miserably. 'My first thought was that he had been set upon by roughs — sandbagged, perhaps. But I see now that it couldn't have been that. It looks more as if he had been thrown, or fallen from somewhere. But — where on earth could he have fallen from?'

He looked helplessly around. There seemed, indeed, no place from which a grown man could have fallen. Unless he had fallen from the house itself — the roof, perhaps? Euan's gaze ran rapidly over the façade in front of him and suddenly inspiration leapt full-grown to his eye —

'That door!' he exclaimed, pointing up.

But Lucia did not follow the pointing finger; her eyes, her whole intent gaze was upon something else, something which Euan's sudden movement had caused to flutter as if from the grasp of the dead man's hand. It was a piece of torn green muslin.

Euan stooped to pick up the fluttering thing and, turning to hand it to Lucia, saw that she had fainted.

'Thank goodness!' he thought devoutly. He was firmly of the opinion that women ought to faint at awkward moments. Not only does it save much wear and tear of the female nervous system, but it leaves the way clear for men to get things done. Now he could call Kathy. Kathy was different — as good as a man in an emergency. But he would get Mrs. Fenwell inside first. She went with him docilely and made no protest as he closed the door.

'What on earth are you trying to do?' called Kathrine's clear, unhurried voice from the top of the stairway. 'Are you a burglar or — why, it's Mother!'

Almost as soon as her startled exclamation reached him, she was down the stairs, wrapping the older woman in her pitiful young arms.

'What is it, Euan? Has Father —'

'No, she is all right. It is only a faint, Kathy. Let me carry her . . . the sofa is best . . . have you any smelling-salts handy?'

The smelling-salts, he thought, might take some moments in finding and every moment brought the doctor nearer. But Kathrine was back with them almost at once.

'Now — tell me,' she said quietly. 'Quick, before she comes to herself, so I shall know what to do.'

'It is your father, Kathy. He has been hurt — a fall, I think. Right at the door —'

She had the door open while he still halted in explanation and what she saw made further speech unnecessary. Euan heard the little cry she gave. But he did not follow her. Kathy, he knew, liked to meet things alone. Presently she came back, white but valiant.

'Poor Mother!' she said. 'I wish I could have saved her that! Did she — find him, Euan?'

'No. But it was a bad shock . . . She is stirring now.'

'Let me stay with her. Will you go upstairs and waken Gilda? Knock on the first door to the right. Tell her to dress quickly. Have you sent for any one?'

'Dr. Bryce will be here in a moment.'

'And we can't do anything — until then?'

'No,' said Euan.

'Then I'll keep Mother here until he has been moved. Don't let them be long, Euan.'

Euan promised that they would not be long. That she should turn to him was too sweet a thing to think about. He hurried upstairs and repeated Kathrine's message in answer to Gilda's sleepy 'What's wrong?' Then, as he turned away, he noticed a curious thing. The door, through which he had convinced himself that Fenwell had fallen, was shut and locked and the key had been taken away. He turned the handle to make sure. The door was quite fast. Then, how on earth — ?

He went back slowly to the sitting-room. Lucia had recovered during his absence and was lying against the sofa cushions in a listless apathy which Euan thought much better than the hysterics which he had feared. But Kathrine looked strained and anxious.

'Three men are coming down the road, Euan. One is Jake Haskins. I can hear his voice.'

'Then Dr. Bryce is with him. It was Jake who found — who went to tell the doctor.'

'But there are three men.'

'The other will be Chief Jones.' Euan looked unhappily at Lucia, but she seemed not to be listening. 'You see, if it's a case of assault —'

'But you said he fell?'

'I thought he did. It looked as if he might have fallen from the door upstairs. But the door is locked. I noticed it as I wakened Gilda.'

'The door — upstairs?' faltered Kathrine. She sat down suddenly on the nearest chair.

'Here they are,' said Euan.

She made a sign that he should meet them.

Archibald Jones, Blencarrow's Chief of Police, was not the type of man who is at his best in the morning. Believing, on principle, that the early hours are made for sleep, Mr. Jones cherished a standing grudge against the inventor of telephones. But on those rare occasions when excitement beckoned he could make as quick a toilet as any one. Jake's telephone message had made up in emotion what it lacked in lucidity, but the reiteration of the dread words 'assault and battery' had awakened lively expectations in Mr. Jones. He made the Fenwell gate at the same time as Dr. Bryce, who lived three blocks nearer. Into his pocket he had slipped a copy of the Riot Act for use in case of need. Therefore the discovery that there was no riot, no disturbance of any kind, only a dead man in a quiet garden with young Euan Cameron as sole attendant, was a considerable disappointment. It was annoying, too, that Euan should have turned to Dr. Bryce for directions instead of to himself. Also that both the doctor and Euan seemed more thoughtful for the living than concerned about the dead.

'It was rather dreadful for Mrs. Fenwell to leave him lying like this,' said Euan. 'But we felt that you might need to see exactly how things were . . . and Chief Jones, too, of course.'

'Very proper,' said Chief Jones portentously. 'In these here cases —'

'Just stand aside for a moment, Chief, will you?' said Dr. Bryce. 'My examination will not take long.' He glanced up at Euan. 'You noticed the fractures of the leg? and arm? — both on the right side? Death probably due to shock. We can move him now — whenever you are ready, Chief.'

But Chief Jones was not going to be ready as easily as all that. The law must assert itself. 'Just a moment, Doctor,'

he said haughtily, 'just *one* moment, *if* you please. In these here — in this kind of cases it is advisable to go slow.'

'Go slow, then, but hurry up,' urged Euan. 'We've seen how he lies. And Mrs. Fenwell —'

'In this kind of cases,' interrupted Mr. Jones ponderously, 'it is impossible to consider the ladies.'

Euan's glance met the doctor's and his lips formed 'pom-pous fool,' but the doctor, though he shrugged his shoulders, shook his head. Such as he was, Chief Jones was the Law.

'What are you going to do?' he asked patiently.

This was something of a poser, for of what to do Chief Jones had not the vaguest idea. The Riot Act was clearly not indicated. Fortunately for official prestige, Jake Haskins' indulgence in the lighter forms of literature had not been entirely without fruit.

'He's got to take measurements, hasn't he?' asked Jake.

Chief Jones surveyed Jake commendingly. 'Just so,' said he. 'In this kind of cases, correct measurements are the — the backbone, so to speak, of all — er — investigation. Can either of you gentlemen oblige me with a tape line?'

'I never carry one except to sewing circle,' said Euan. He was beginning to be sorry that he had sent for Chief Jones.

'I've got a yard string,' said Jake helpfully. 'If I hang on to one end and you take holt of the other, could we do it with that?'

Chief Jones thought that they could. So with Jake at one end and himself at the other, he marked out the distance of the body from every surrounding object and the distance of each surrounding object from every other. To the polite inquiry of Euan if he expected an earthquake to redistribute the landscape, he replied that in this kind of cases he made it a rule to take no risks. Then, having entered all the measurements in a notebook and placed stones to mark the exact position of the body, he signified that the removal might take place . . .

'Doctors are all very well,' he confided to Jake as they came slowly downstairs again. 'And maybe Dr. Bryce is right in saying he died of shock. But what the people of this town will expect the Police to find out is what shocked him and who did it.'

'Sure, they will,' agreed Jake. 'That's what they'll want to know, sure as gun's iron.'

'Don't be stupid, Jake,' said Euan pointedly. 'Dr. Bryce meant a physical shock, not a mental one. The impact of the fall shocked him. If, for instance, he slipped off the roof —'

'Roof? Was he on the roof?' asked the Chief, disappointed. 'Why in thunder didn't you say so before?'

'I don't say so now,' patiently. 'I say *if* he had fallen from a roof or from any height, it would account satisfactorily for his injuries — which the theory of his being set upon does not. Besides, there are no signs of a struggle, no footprints, nothing.'

'Footprints!' said the Chief, conscious-stricken. 'Yes, we've got to be terrible careful about footprints. Next to measurements, footprints matter a whole lot. And as for there not being any — why, the path is sloppy with them.'

'Yours,' said Euan. 'And mine and Dr. Bryce's and Jake's. There is a patch of damp earth just inside the gate which would take a print like plaster. When I came to fix the gate at six o'clock this morning, the rain had washed it as smooth as my hand. There wasn't a mark of any kind upon it.'

'There wasn't?'

'Not one.'

Chief Jones cleared his throat. 'Then how did Fenwell get in?' he asked sapiently. 'He didn't drop from a balloon, I don't suppose?'

'Your supposition is probably correct. But, surely, you can see another inference?'

'I can see,' said Chief Jones, 'a hanged sight more than you can, young man. But I'm not telling everything — not by a long shot.'

'All right. Only, of course, it is plain that he must have come in before it began to rain. That would make it somewhere before half-past twelve.'

Chief Jones made a note. 'It might,' he observed non-committally. 'Or it might not. When we examine his boots —'

'He had no boots on!' said Euan suddenly. 'I saw that — but I forgot.'

Chief Jones cleared his throat.

'No more he had,' he admitted. 'I was wondering if you'd have noticed it. No boots is very important. Next to measurements, it's as important as anything we've got. If we can find out who took his boots off and if the person who did it can't prove that he was somewheres else at the time, we —'

'Mr. Jones!'

Kathrine had come behind them so quietly that they had not heard her. She was very pale, but otherwise quite composed.

'Father took off his own boots,' she said. 'That is what I came to tell you. I can't leave Mother long, but I think you ought to know just what happened.'

'Do you know, Kathy?' asked Euan, in surprise.

'I can guess. It wasn't an assault or anything like that. It was an accident. He fell.'

'Where from?' asked Jake incredulously.

But Chief Jones repressed him with a podgy hand.

'Maybe he did,' he remarked soothingly. 'We were just saying that there being no footprints meant that he'd fell from somewheres. But then again, as there's no place to fall from, maybe he didn't. It's the duty of the Police to find all that out, Miss Fenwell. So don't get to worrying.'

'But,' said Kathrine, 'you don't need to find out. I can tell you.'

'Well, now,' said the Chief loftily. 'We don't object to your speaking out what's in your mind. What might you be thinking of — windows? roofs? chimneys?'

'No, none of those. Father fell from the door in the upstairs hall.'

'You forget that it was locked,' said Euan gently.

'Very natural,' observed the Chief. 'The lay mind can't be expected to remember everything. A man,' he explained kindly, 'can't fall through a door and lock it after him.'

'No,' said Kathrine; 'I locked it. It is very simple,' she went on, without waiting for their surprise to voice itself. 'We have always been afraid of an accident with that door. When Father was — not himself, he had a fancy that it led into the part of the house which was never built. He would sometimes try to open it. We wanted to board it up, but he would never allow it. So we kept the key hidden. Finding the door locked always broke the delusion — for the time. But of course it had to be opened sometimes — on cleaning days, anyway. Mrs. Yamen, who helps us clean occasionally, knows where the key is kept and uses it for that purpose. She has always been very careful.'

Chief Jones cleared his throat.

'When did she clean last?' asked Euan quickly.

'Yesterday. But, of course, we do not know how the door came to be left unlocked. We know only that it was so. Last night, just as it began to rain, the banging of a door woke Mother and me. We both got up to see what it was and discovered that the noise had come from there. I opened the door and looked out, but saw nothing. Father, we thought, had not come home. The downstairs doors were closed and there was no sign of any one having come in. We locked the door and went back to bed, feeling very glad that the storm had shown us the condition of the door before anything had

happened. But, you see' — with a little gesture — 'we were wrong. What had happened was already over.'

Chief Jones cleared his throat. He was at once disappointed and relieved. The touch of mystery which had specialized this case had been stimulating, but it might quite easily have become embarrassing also.

'Very tragic,' he murmured — 'dreadful — very sad, indeed! And are you quite sure that — er — after all, you know, the door may have just blown shut like you thought. No use in getting worked up. Your father maybe didn't come in at all.'

'He did,' said Kathrine briefly. 'This morning I found his boots where he left them at the foot of the stairs.'

'Oh,' said Chief Jones with great acumen, 'that clears up my point about the boots.'

'It clears up everything,' said Euan firmly.

'Possibly, possibly,' said the Chief. 'To the lay mind, no doubt. But the Police see different. In this kind of cases the Police waits until the inquest.'

Kathrine drew a quick breath. 'Oh, Euan, will there be an inquest?'

'That,' said Chief Jones tartly, 'is a matter with which this young man has nothing to do. The Police —'

'Excuse me,' said Euan politely. 'I think it is the Coroner who orders an inquest.'

'Same thing,' said Mr. Jones. 'Dr. Bryce will not obstruct the Law.'

'Is Dr. Bryce the Coroner?' Kathrine's tone was so relieved that the Chief smiled.

'Friend of the family, you mean?' he retorted good-humouredly. 'Well, I hope none of us is otherwise, Miss Fenwell. If there's an inquest it's for the good of you as well as on account of what's proper. Why — think a bit! You don't want folks saying that your poor deceased father went and threw himself out on purpose?'

Kathrine and Euan looked at each other.

'I hadn't thought of that,' said Kathrine.

Chief Jones cleared his throat.

'It takes the Police to think of everything,' he admitted grandly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

It was not every day that Blencarrow had an inquest. The last one thought necessary had been when Lawyer Baird had killed a burglar by mistake. He had explained that he had not intended to kill him — had no idea that the old revolver which he flourished was loaded. Still, Blencarrow thought he should have been more careful. Supposing it had not been a burglar, after all? But the inquest smoothed things out beautifully. A man, it appeared, had the right to shoot at unexplained intruders in his own house. The 'Blencarrow Herald' had a fine and original editorial entitled 'An Englishman's House is his Castle,' in which it was shown that a Scotsman has exactly the same rights or even more so. This article caused every householder to glow with importance, and sent the 'Herald's' subscription list up at least fifty. Indeed, Lawyer Baird might easily have become a hero, only that he persisted in being upset by the whole thing and told the would-be hero-worshippers to go to the devil.

The inquest on Gilbert Fenwell promised to be even more exciting than the inquest on the burglar. There was a certain obscure satisfaction connected with it. Blencarrow had shaken its head over Gilbert Fenwell for years. It had predicted a bad end scores of times, and it is something to have a prediction justified. Of course, the end had not been quite so bad as had been expected. Quite an ordinary, decent man might have fallen out of a door or a window or even off a roof. To have lived up to Blencarrow's expectation, Gilbert ought by rights to have made away with a few of his family first or at least to have indulged in a personal exit more spectacular.

To offset this tameness, a certain feeling of mystery was

communicated by the matter of the unlocked door. It was whispered that there was such a thing as 'contributory negligence.' The phrase originated with Chief Jones and was felt to do him credit. It was said, too, that it was owing to this efficient officer that Dr. Bryce had ordered the inquest. He might never have thought of it otherwise, being a victim of what Chief Jones referred to pityingly as 'the lay mind.' And as to its being hard on the family, the Chief was known to have said that the family ought to be thankful that there was the Law to take responsibility off their shoulders. Even the friends of the Fenwells were inclined to think there was something in this — better to let the Law write Gilbert Fenwell's epitaph and be done with him once for all. And Andrew Cameron quieted Euan's indignation with the remark that 'It's a smothered fire which burns longest what-effer.'

Roger MacIvor's Step was pleasantly divided in opinion. 'Contributory negligence, indeed!' said Æneas Sowerby. 'It'll be a fine thing if a woman is to have an inquest put upon her every time she forgets to lock the front door.'

This was felt to be too highly flavoured with Mrs. Sowerby to pass as an original observation.

'Aye, the wimmen will feel that, no doubt,' said Sandy McCorquodale. 'But what I'd like to be feeling sure of is, was the door unlocked or was it not? Tell us that?'

Æneas was not able to tell him that, knowing in fact nothing about it.

'There's queer tales going around,' said Thomas Nichol in his heavy way. 'There's one that comes from the North American and says that Gilbert Fenwell was seeing things before ever he left the bar. It was a big black cat he was seeing, or most likely that, for he kept saying "Put her out!" and "Out she goes!" And them that heard him think he went home still hunting the cat and chased her up into the roof. It's wonderful the power of a delusion like that.'

The Step agreed that delusions were queer things. But it was not much inclined to accept Mr. Nichol's version of the black cat. It was much too possible.

'There's more than one queer thing about this town of late,' opined Æneas, again emboldened. 'Folks are asking what the meaning will be of a certain flitting that's planned at the Rectory. Maybe you have heard that the Reverend Dwight's nephew is for England in a fortnight? Nor is there any word of change of plan, though his promised wife's father is lying dead with an inquest sittin' on him. That's what Mrs. Binns, the Rector's housekeeper, tells the wife.'

'Aye,' said Sandy McCorquodale, with authority, 'from what Mrs. McCorquodale can see from the windy, young Emigh hasn't been near the Fenwell house for days. It's very queer-like actions, she says, for one that might be supposed to be a prop and stay.'

'Would Mrs. McCorquodale be suggesting that the lad, and not a black cat, pushed Gilbert off the roof?' asked Roger MacIvor slyly.

'She would not,' said Sandy, startled. 'Mrs. McCorquodale would only be telling what she saw and with no suggestions whateffer.'

Roger laughed.

'These tales are havers,' he declared with finality. 'There'll be nothing to it but that the man was fair moidered and didn't know a door from a windy. I've seen him the like more times than I can number.'

This was so undeniable that invention languished, especially as not one of them really suspected any irregularity in the matter of Gilbert's taking-off. It was only that they felt a little discussion to be due a man who in life had so often varied the monotony of Blencarrow conversation. Neither was it felt inconsistent with sympathy and good will that a certain spicier interest should attach to the widow and her daughters as principals in a temporary mystery.

And at the best, the time for deductive and constructive solutions was short. After the inquest everybody would know everything.

At the Fenwell house there was quiet, and drawn blinds. Coolness had followed the breaking of the heat. The blinds swayed against the pull of the open windows with a gentle tapping. It was as if noise and violence had departed from the place forever — as if the house itself had ceased to watch and wait and had become as other houses, acquiescent.

Kathrine sat on the lowest step of the stairs and rested against the wall. Through the open door she saw the rain-refreshed garden. It looked strange and unfamiliar. She did not know how, but she did know that since death had entered it its character had changed. 'Funny!' she said to herself.

The gate, which hung proudly now upon two hinges, clicked, and a little boy, one of her own pupils, slipped through. As he rounded the curve in the path, Kathrine saw that he stepped warily as if he, too, noticed the change in the garden. In his hand he held an envelope, and at the sight of the writing on it, Kathrine felt her nerves tighten. It was the old reaction to that particular writing which had meant so much . . . and now could mean nothing . . . ever.

'Is it for Miss Gilda, Tommy?'

'No, Miss Fenwell, 'tis for you.'

'Thank you, Tommy.'

'There's an answer,' said Tommy. He looked around uneasily . . . somewhere in that house there was a dead man . . .

'Sit down on the step, then . . . I'll be only a moment.'

She went into the sitting-room which her own labours had that morning prepared for the coming inquest, and opened the envelope.

'*Dear Kathrine,*' she read, '*Please say that I may come. Let me help you if I can. Garry.*'

The girl smiled a little. It was so like Garry. He would

be feeling very miserable to-day . . . and undecided . . . conscious, too, of wondering glances that he was not with his fiancée in her trouble . . . impossible to announce the broken engagement at such a moment . . . and he would not dream how hard a thing he asked of her!

She wrote hastily, '*Certainly you may come,*' signed it with her initial, and gave it to the waiting Tommy. Then she took her interrupted way upstairs to her mother's room.

Lucia, after her first fainting spell, had 'kept up' wonderfully. She had indulged in no 'nerves,' had gone to bed and taken the sleeping-powder which the doctor had prescribed. She had, indeed, astonished and even worried Kathrine by her entire acquiescence in everything. Beyond liking to have Gilda sit in her room, she seemed to care little for anything. 'Reaction,' the doctor said.

But the doctor did not know that Kathrine had seen her mother under 'reaction' before and that this was quite different. Neither did he know that his patient had got suddenly out of bed several times and gone into the room where her husband lay. Kathrine, the first time she noticed this, had followed, to find her bending over the body with a puzzled gaze. As the girl entered, she looked up.

'He is dead, isn't he?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Kathrine gravely.

Lucia sighed softly. 'I can always believe what you say, Kathrine,' she said, and had gone quietly back to bed again.

The news of the inquest had not excited her and she seemed to understand its reason and necessity. She would be quite able, she said, to give her evidence. But Kathrine was not at ease.

'I think,' she told the doctor, 'that Mother has something on her mind. Something besides Father's death, I mean.'

'What could it possibly be?'

'I don't know, Doctor.' But her voice was troubled. Even as she spoke, there had flashed into her mind a detail of

Euan's story which, at the time, she had passed over as of no significance — that strip of green muslin which had fluttered from beneath the dead man's hand! Could Lucia have misinterpreted that? Had she fainted because she thought — the idea was so fantastic that Kathrine brushed it aside. Yet it persisted, and to-day, while sitting on the stair, she had determined to settle the matter.

As she entered her mother's room to help her dress, she found that Lucia had not waited for her, but sat already in a chair by the window.

'Gilda dressed me,' she told Kathrine with an almost childish pride.

Gilda, looking guilty, said, 'She simply insisted, and the doctor said we were not to argue with her.'

Kathrine nodded. 'Will you go down, Gilda? In case any one comes.'

When she had willingly departed, Kathrine sat down beside her mother's chair, and, without explanation, laid in her lap the strip of torn green.

'Were you worrying about this, Mother?'

The invalid fingered the strip idly.

'Euan gave it to me,' the girl went on. 'He told me where it was found and that he thought its being there had startled you. So we tried to find out where it had come from.'

'It's Gilda's,' said Lucia. 'But, you see, it's only a little piece. It frightened me at first. Because, you know, he said he would drag her as low as he was. But it's such a tiny piece. I must have caught her back in time. I think, for once, he failed.'

'Mother,' said Kathrine steadily, 'I don't know what you mean. You are talking wildly. But I want you to listen. Euan and I found out where this scrap of muslin came from. It was torn from Gilda's sleeve, by a thorn of the rosebush just outside the door — another piece of it is still hanging there. This bit must have been blown down by the wind.'

'It was in his hand,' said Lucia. 'It frightened me. Because he said —'

'Listen, Mother.' Kathrine laid a quieting hand over Lucia's restless one. 'Gilda did not see Father that night any more than you or I did. She was in bed and sound asleep. I saw her. This piece was torn from her dress the afternoon before. I noticed the tear at supper-time. So you see it is all explained. And there is nothing whatever to worry about.'

'I am not worrying,' said Lucia with dignity. 'I have not worried for a long time, but I understand your father better than you do, Kathrine. Gilda is safe, I know. She helped me dress to-day. But who can say what might have happened if I had not saved her? Even as it was, you see, he snatched at her — to drag her down, down — as he said. I saw the piece of her dress in his hand. But you tell me he is dead. Why should I worry? I always believe you, Kathrine.'

'Yes, Mother.' Kathrine controlled herself with an effort. Here was something even worse than she had feared — a delusion beyond the power of provable facts to penetrate. She tried again. 'Yes, Father is dead. He died by a terrible accident. But you are wrong in connecting Gilda with it. Gilda —'

Lucia interrupted with uplifted hand. 'I do not connect Gilda with it,' she said, 'and if you do, you are very wrong. You have never done your sister justice, my dear. Gilda never means any harm. That is why she was protected — only a shred of her dress in his hand — nothing more!'

Kathrine rose with a white face. It was evidently useless to combat the delusion by argument. It might die away of itself. But the conviction in Lucia's tone had been so absolute . . . Kathrine almost thought she could see that snatching hand. Her own hands were cold and shaking as she measured the tonic Dr. Bryce had left.

'You are nervous, Kathrine,' said Lucia. 'Call Gilda. She gives me my tonic very nicely.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THERE were times when the most tight-fisted admitted that the 'Blencarrow Herald' justified its subscription price, and the least thoughtful were moved to compassionate society before the invention of the printing-press. Not every one in Blencarrow might attend the inquest. Very few, in fact, could attend it. There are such things as finer feelings. An inquest held in the home of the deceased and with the deceased's family personally present would naturally preclude any unnecessary intrusion. But it did not preclude curiosity, and this was where the 'Herald' met a felt want. The 'Herald,' it was known, had engaged a special reporter, and a running account of the proceedings was therefore to be expected at the earliest possible moment. The reporter would arrange to sit beside the window, through which he would pass out copy to a boy waiting upon the other side. The boy would be provided with a bicycle and the last word in reportorial efficiency would be achieved.

Not only this. The 'Herald' had arranged that a 'feature writer' should also be present. This latter was an importation. His name was Eric Marsh, and he was a tall young man with sandy hair and eyeglasses. Mr. Marsh himself admitted that he was 'quite a dab at human interest stuff' . . . 'It's a kind of gift,' explained he modestly. 'A sort of seeing eye. I can't help it. What I don't see isn't there.'

'Sure thing, you can't help it, Eric,' answered the 'Herald' office boy. 'What you do see ain't there neither!' This was how Mr. Marsh had come to be known locally as the 'Seeing Eye.'

Unfortunately, in Blencarrow he had little scope for his special genius. Everybody else saw quite as much as he did. But this inquest, he felt, would give him his opportunity.

He felt it right up to within few hours of the inquest's opening or until, to be more precise, he had met Euan Cameron and Conway de Beck, who joined themselves to him in a friendly manner and impressed upon him their opinion of human interest stuff as extracted in any degree from friends of theirs. Mr. Marsh, in reply, had been eloquent upon the subjects of intimidation and freedom of the press. Whereupon Con had admitted, good-humouredly, that everything he said was true and that no doubt he (Mr. Marsh) would be glad to suffer for his convictions. Euan added a few details regarding the possible nature of these sufferings. After which they left him with a kindly nod.

The inquest, Dr. Bryce had decided, would be as brief as possible. He felt grave doubts as to Mrs. Fenwell's ability to stand it and would gladly have excused her, only that the mention of such an idea excited her unnecessarily.

'We shall have to give in to her,' he told Kathrine. 'Do you know why she is so anxious to be there?'

'Yes,' said Kathrine. 'She wants to hear the evidence: she seems unable to realize — what I mean is, Doctor, that she isn't sure my father is dead. I have to keep assuring her that he is.'

'Dear me!' said Dr. Bryce, startled. 'She said nothing of the kind to me. The result of shock, of course.'

'You think it is temporary, Doctor — something that will pass off?'

'Sure to! Rest and quiet, cheerful conversation . . . nourishing food. But I don't like her running this temperature. Are you sure she has not been exposed to any chill?'

'None that I know of. It was damp in the hall that night, but not cold, and she was there only a few moments.'

'Well — we must watch it carefully. Are you all right yourself?'

'Perfectly. I don't dare be anything else.'

'Good girl!' said Dr. Bryce. 'Here comes our doughty

Chief to say that he has collected his six jurors. Do not bring Mrs. Fenwell down until the last moment. We have to view the body first — you understand?’

It was a curiously mixed company which gathered in the sitting-room that day. The six jurors, in black coats and with hair still wet from the brush, sat awkwardly along one side between the windows. The family and their few intimate friends sat together nearest the door. Mrs. Graham was there, thoroughly grieved at the unpleasantness of things and solicitous that Lucia should have a cushion at her back. Amy sat by Gilda and attempted to hold her hand, but her commiserating glance was on Kathrine whose withdrawal from the blessings of her own friendship she had never understood. The Reverend Ronald McKenzie was there — for was it not a member of his flock (though sadly strayed) who lay dead upstairs? Andrew Cameron was there, he being the only one for whom Lucia had inquired, and there were others, but not many. The reporter was made as inconspicuous as possible, and the Seeing Eye, who had been conducted to a chair by Euan, was so placed that his every movement could be scrutinized by the observant Con. Garry sat with Andrew Cameron at the back of the room. He looked thin and white. Gilda, after a first glance at him, looked quickly away. She had not quite realized how serious things had been for Garry. Perhaps she felt a little sorry — sorry, at least, that men need be so silly. At Con, too, she had looked but once. He was observing her with a thoughtful expression and, for a change, without amusement in his eyes . . . What was he thinking of? . . . Was it possible that he had seen her as she leaned out of the door that afternoon? . . . She thought it hardly possible . . . not that it really mattered . . . She was quite prepared to admit, if asked, that she had opened the door . . . any one might have opened the door . . . but she certainly did not intend to volunteer the information.

The inquest opened with a brief medical report as to the injuries suffered by the deceased and gave shock as the immediate cause of death. The report was made by Dr. Barlow, still known as young Dr. Barlow because he had practised in Blencarrow for only ten years. He had been called in by Dr. Bryce, and his evidence was the substance of their joint conclusions based upon examination of the body after death. His statement having been quite plain, he was not cross-examined.

Mrs. Fenwell was the first to be examined. She had been awakened, she said, on the night of August 20th by the slamming of a door and on investigation had found that the upstairs door, usually locked, had been by some oversight left open. She had concluded that it had been blown sharply back and shut again by the rising wind and that the noise of its closing had aroused her. Her daughter Kathrine, also aroused, had agreed with her. They had locked the door and, after seeing that everything was right in the house, had returned to bed. In the morning she had heard voices in the garden -- the voices of the friends who had discovered her husband's body. She had seen the body as it lay and had realized at once that a fall from the door in question seemed not only possible but likely. She could only conclude that Mr. Fenwell, on coming home just at the beginning of the storm, had entered the house, and, slipping upstairs in his stocking feet, had seen the door unlatched; and in attempting to close it, or under a delusion as to what door it was, had fallen through it to his death.

The Coroner asked but a few questions.

'Was it possible for the deceased to have come up the stair without disturbing any one?'

Mrs. Fenwell said that this was quite possible. It had happened on various occasions; though not, of course, as a usual thing. But this night the wind was up and any extra noise might easily have passed unnoticed.

Had the possibility of the deceased having entered occurred to her?

At first it had. But when she saw the downstairs doors all closed and no sign of anything having been disturbed, she had thought no more of it.

Had she noticed the boots of the deceased in the downstairs hall?

No, she had not. The boots, as afterward appeared, had been hidden by the stair post.

Had she ever had any occasion to be afraid of an accident happening by means of that door?

Yes. She had always been afraid of it. But Mr. Fenwell had refused to have it boarded in or even nailed. She had done what she could by keeping it always locked and the key hidden.

Had the danger which she feared taken any particular form?

The danger had taken the form of a delusion on the part of Mr. Fenwell when under the influence of liquor. In certain states he fancied that the house had been really built as originally planned. In that case the outside door would have opened, not upon the garden, but into a large front bedroom. Her husband on various former occasions had been found trying to open this door with the idea of entering the bedroom and had only with difficulty been restrained.

A little sigh went round the room at this. In spite of the few and colourless words in which it was couched, something of the horror of those 'former occasions' had broken through. Mr. Marsh made copious notes in his notebook, but, happening to catch Con's eye, he hastily crossed them out again.

Finally, then, had Mrs. Fenwell any idea of how the key came to be in the door that night?

Mrs. Fenwell could not say. She presumed that it had been forgotten. The door had been opened that day for cleaning purposes. But Mrs. Yamen, who had washed the

glass, had been accustomed to washing it for years and had always been most careful.

Kathrine was then called to corroborate her mother's evidence. The only item which she added was the fact of her having opened the door to look out. She had seen and heard nothing. The night was pitch black and wild with wind and rain. She had concluded that, as her father had not come in, he intended staying somewhere until the storm had passed.

Here one of the jurors wanted to know if she, the witness, knew that all hotels and law-abiding places of entertainment closed their doors at twelve o'clock?

Kathrine said that in that case there must be some places of entertainment which were not so law-abiding, as it was not at all unusual for her father to remain away all night.

Another ripple passed over the room at this. And Mr. Marsh of the Seeing Eye squirmed in an agony of thwarted ambition.

Questioned as to the presence of the key, Kathrine said that she could not account for its being in the lock — except on the ground of accidental forgetfulness.

'Forgetfulness on the part of some one in particular?'

On the part of some one, naturally, but not on the part of any one in particular.

She herself had not used the key that day?

She had not.

Gilda, being called, testified simply that she had been asleep. She slept very soundly. The bang of the door might have roused her slightly, but she did not remember it. She had known nothing of the accident until she had been awakened in the morning.

Had she noticed the door open the day before?

She had seen Mrs. Yamen cleaning the glass. But she had been in the garden at the time and did not see her either unlock or lock the door.

Could she explain how the key came to be in the lock?

Gilda's eyes opened in childlike surprise. 'Only that some one must have forgotten to take it out,' she said innocently.

Kindly glances followed her to her seat. Anything sweeter than Gilda in her plain black dress can hardly be imagined.

Jake Haskins was next called and deposed to having 'run agen' the body 'unexpected' while making his morning rounds. He had, with great presence of mind, called Euan Cameron, who was 'fiddling around with the Fenwell gate,' and together they had 'inspected the corpse' and had discovered that life was 'extinct.' Asked if he had observed anything of which the jury should have cognizance, Jake had looked puzzled, but ended by saying in a grieved tone that he hadn't had much chance to see that or anything else — on account of being ordered off to get the doctor. He had not left, however, before the arrival of Mrs. Fenwell, who was naturally 'in quite a state.'

Euan came next and gave his evidence briefly. On being questioned, he said that he had thought at once that the deceased had been dead some hours — but had made only a casual examination pending the arrival of the doctor. He had thought, too, that violence of some kind had accompanied the death and at first sight had suspected a brawl as the possible solution.

This was why he had suggested sending for Chief Jones. On closer inspection of the injuries he had thought the brawl improbable and had looked around for an explanation which might indicate a heavy fall. The only probable means of accounting for this seemed to be the unguarded door on the second floor. He had mentioned this possibility to Mrs. Fenwell just at the moment of her collapse and so had received no confirmation. Later, when he had gone upstairs on an errand, he had observed the door, and, seeing that it was locked, had tried to think of some other solution. It had been Miss Kathrine Fenwell who had made the situation plain by telling of what had happened

during the night. The explanation had fitted in with everything which he had observed and accounted satisfactorily for the fact that the deceased had worn no boots. In his own opinion there was no doubt that the deceased had fallen from the door in question.

The evidence of Chief Jones, on which he had put much anxious thought, was largely given up to words. Many of the words, taken by themselves, were excellent, though their sum total did not add much to the general enlightenment. But, here and there, a detached phrase such as 'the lay mind,' 'methods of police procedure,' 'theory of deduction,' 'combination of evidence,' etc., testified to a studious perusal of that excellent handbook 'The Policeman's Guide.' By and large this evidence revealed nothing that the jurymen did not already know and a sporting offer on the Chief's part to reconstruct, by means of measurements taken at the time, the exact position of the body when found was, as the Seeing Eye expressed it, 'not taken advantage of.'

A thrill of interest shivered expectantly through the room when Mrs. Elizabeth Yamen began her testimony. Mrs. Yamen, charwoman and daily help, was so well known in Blencarrow that no one realized how completely unknown she was. She was a very small woman made, apparently, of wire and whipcord. Her face was as brown as an autumn leaf and gave the impression of having been squeezed while wet and never smoothed out. No one had ever seen her without the faded brown wig which was always put on a little to one side. Beneath it, and surrounded by the crumpled brownness of her face, twinkled a pair of eyes extraordinarily bright and black. She had a way of turning them on you, head slightly tilted, which gave a disconcerting impression of an old and wise crow. Her voice, which was thin and shrill, helped the illusion. She had no children and no relatives. There was no Mr. Yamen, though it was believed that he had existed in prehistoric times. And, finally, she

was indispensable in Blencarrow. She 'helped out' Mayor Tiddy, just as she 'helped out' the Fenwells. Mrs. Yamen was above all class and property distinctions.

This being, in a sense, a holiday, Mrs. Yamen wore her Sunday best — a decent black cashmere with bead trimming. She wore a black bonnet, also beaded. The strings of this bonnet were a part of Mrs. Yamen's self-expression. She tied and untied them as some people clear their throats or fiddle with a finger ring.

'Your name,' said Dr. Bryce, 'is Mrs. Elizabeth Yamen?'

Mrs. Yamen tightened her bonnet strings.

'It is a name,' she said, 'which will do as good as any.'

The Seeing Eye, scenting human interest, hurriedly made a note. And the Coroner was so surprised that it took him a moment to realize that it didn't really matter what Mrs. Yamen's name might be.

'You were working at this house on the day of the twentieth?'

'I was.'

'Did you on that day have occasion to clean the glass in the door upstairs?'

'It needed it bad,' said Mrs. Yamen.

'Tell us what you did, and be as exact as you can.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Yamen, untying her bonnet strings, 'I got around here about eight o'clock and started in to get some curtains out of soak —'

'I do not mean just that,' interrupted Dr. Bryce; 'what we want to know concerns the cleaning of the door in the hall. We would like to hear exactly what you remember about that.'

'Well,' said the witness after consideration, 'I just cleaned the door.'

'Yes, but — for instance, in what condition did you find the door?'

'Middlin',' said Mrs. Yamen; 'I've seen it worse.'

'I mean — was the door locked?'

'It was always locked.'

'Was it locked on that day?'

'Yes.'

'You are sure of that? Why?'

'Because it always was locked.'

'You knew why it was kept locked?'

'I'd be considerably stupid if I didn't.'

'You unlocked the door on that day?'

'Yes.'

'You remember doing this?'

'No.'

'But — then how do you know that you did unlock it?'

'Because I couldn't have got outside of it if I hadn't.'

'The door might have been unlocked.'

'It might. But it wasn't.'

'You are sure of that, then. Now, after you had unlocked it, what did you do?'

'Well, I don't hold with dabbing whiting onto window-glass, like some. So I got a bit of hot water in my pail and a drop or two of coal oil and I give the glass a right good clean. I cleaned it on the outside first and then on the inside, and then Miss Kathy asked me if I was too tired to mop down the cellar steps and I said, "Law, Miss Kathy, I'm never tired!" and —'

'Yes, Mrs. Yamen. But it is the door we are concerned with. Did you lock the door?'

Mrs. Yamen's bright black eyes wandered over the small but intent audience. They passed over Kathrine, over Gilda, over Lucia, and flashed back to the questioner's face.

'I pre-sume I did,' said Mrs. Yamen.

'Are you sure that you did?'

'I don't recollect not.'

'But this is very important. Might you, for some reason or other, have neglected to lock the door at the moment and

later, being occupied with other things, have forgotten it altogether?’

‘I might,’ said the witness with suspicious alacrity. ‘Many’s the time I might have done that. I might have said to myself that I wouldn’t be a party to the coddling and fussing over a grown man like he was a baby in arms. And I might have thought it would be a good thing for more than one —’

Dr. Bryce rapped sharply on the table.

‘We are not interested in what you might have done.’

‘Then don’t ask me.’ Mrs. Yamen tied her bonnet strings with a jerk.

‘You misunderstood. The question plainly is, Did you or did you not lock the door?’

Mrs. Yamen looked injured.

‘I told you what I pre-sumed I did,’ said she with dignity. ‘But you might as well ask me did I shut the gate when I went home. Or did I wind the clock as I do regular. Likely I did all that and more, but I don’t remember the doing of it — no more than breathing, I don’t, and never shall.’

‘You mean,’ said the Coroner patiently, ‘that the act of locking the door had become so customary as to be practically automatic.’

‘Maybe I do,’ said Mrs. Yamen cautiously. ‘But I wouldn’t like to swear to it without a dictionary.’

Dr. Bryce, faintly flushed, tried again:

‘You mean that you had locked the door so often that you had come to do it without thinking about it, and that, therefore, you have no clear memory of the act?’

‘Y-es. I kind of got to do it unbeknownst like.’

The Coroner looked at the jurors.

‘Is that clear?’ he asked.

The jury agreed that it was clear.

‘Well, then,’ went on the Coroner. ‘If you think carefully, is there any outside incident which may aid your memory?’

Miss Kathrine, you say, spoke to you about the cellar steps. What exactly were you doing at that moment? Take your time.'

'I was putting back the draw-curtain into the rod inside.'

'That would mean that the cleaning of the glass was finished?'

'Yes.'

'Does that memory help you at all?'

Again Mrs. Yamen's gaze wandered. This time it rested on the important face of Chief Jones whose pencil was raised to make a note. Chief Jones had once 'said a word' to Mrs. Yamen about letting her hens eat her neighbour's lettuces.

'It don't help me a bit,' said she with finality.

'Then you can't swear either way?'

'I don't feel as how I'd better,' admitted Mrs. Yamen.

The witness was allowed to step aside and, with her going, the interest of the audience perceptibly relaxed. After all, the affair was very simple. A bit of carelessness, so trifling as to be unremembered, had sent Gilbert Fenwell to his fate.

James Duffy, night watchman, was the final witness. He looked, even more than usually, like an owl distressed by daylight. Nevertheless, Mr. Marsh made a note to the effect that 'considerable interest attached to the evidence of Night Watchman Duffy, since, so far as is known, he was the last person to whom Gilbert Fenwell spoke before being overtaken by sudden and inexplicable fate.' (Later, he changed 'inexplicable' to 'tragic' as being better calculated to please certain friends of the family.)

Mr. Duffy's evidence was somewhat confused. All through the hearing he had been looking at Gilda, where she sat so delicately childish in her black dress and trying to reconcile her with the young vixen who had so coldly pushed her father from the precarious support of the gate, and stepped across him with dainty, scornful feet. He couldn't

do it. The only alternative seemed to be that he, James Duffy, had not been seeing straight that morning.

'Where did you last see the deceased alive?' the Coroner asked him.

'Fiddlin' aboot in the bar of the North American,' said Mr. Duffy with grim disapproval.

'At what time?'

'It wad be a few minutes there or thereabouts to the stroke of twelve.'

'In what condition was he?'

'He would have had a wee dropie, or maybe mair.'

'Would you say he was intoxicated?'

'I wull, if I'm put to it,' said Mr. Duffy, 'though, mind you, there's much dependin' on the meanin' folk put to the word. But there's nae doot he was a bit fuddled.'

'What was he doing?'

'He was finishing a bit drink and colloquing with himsel'.'

'You mean he was talking to himself? Did you hear anything that he said?'

'A wheen of daftlike things that I wouldna like to be repeating here.'

'Such as —?'

"'Oot she goes!'" says he, and then again, "Pit her oot!" and, "I'll show her," says he. "It's time you were awa' hame," says I, severe-like. And says he, "I've waited too long already —" which was no lee, ye understan', not but what Gilbert could stan' mair guid whusky than —'

'Yes, but did he say anything which would lead you to believe that he was in any unusual state?'

'I wad say that his state was verra usual, even customary,' said Mr. Duffy with exactness.

'When he said, "Out she goes," and "I'll show her," did you understand him to be referring to anything in particular?'

The owl-like eyes of the witness rested for a second on the sweet and childlike countenance of the younger Miss Fen-

well. It was true that he had had, or thought he had, a certain understanding . . . just an idea-like . . . of the possible direction of Gilbert's cryptic language. But should a man swear to a mere idea in a court of law? . . . Besides, had he been quite himself that morning at the gate? He looked again at Gilda, caught her friendly, wistful smile, and decided that he certainly hadn't.

'I was thinking maybe it wad be a cat,' said Mr. Duffy . . . 'but I'm no sweerin' it was,' he added hastily.

'You did not think it necessary to accompany the deceased home?'

'I did not.'

'You have done so on other occasions?'

'Aye. It wasn't much use puttin' a fine on the likes of him, and to clap him in the lock-up was naught but a tax on the —'

'That will do, Constable. The point is, that, so far as you know, the deceased left the North American bar at about twelve o'clock, alone, and with the intention of going directly home?'

'Aye. He did so.'

'You did not see him again alive?'

'I did not.'

James Duffy stepped aside, and the Coroner directed the jury. The verdict, which was prompt, declared Gilbert Fenwell's end to have been 'accidental death while under the influence of intoxicants.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

'AND, now, Mrs. Fenwell,' said Dr. Bryce, 'we must get you back to bed. You promised, you know.'

The jurors, having murmured awkward condolences, had departed in company with Chief Jones. The 'Herald' reporter and the Seeing Eye had been escorted to the gate by Con in the most friendly way. Even Mrs. Graham and Amy had gone home, being assured by Kathrine that only so could her mother be persuaded to take some rest. The sitting-room looked almost natural once more save for the stiff arrangement of chairs against the wall. And Lucia, her quiet dignity undisturbed, still sat where they had placed her with Mrs. Graham's pillow behind her back.

'Now, Mrs. Fenwell —' again Dr. Bryce reminded her. He did not like those spots of colour on his patient's cheeks.

'Yes, Doctor,' said Lucia. Her voice, like the colour in her cheeks, was higher than usual. 'But it wasn't a cat, you know.'

Dr. Bryce, who thought he had not heard correctly, politely begged her pardon.

'It wasn't a cat,' said Lucia clearly.

The doctor let his hand slip to the pulse-beat in her wrist.

'No, of course not,' he said quietly. 'If you will let your daughter take you upstairs now, Mrs. Fenwell —'

'Gilda shall take me upstairs,' said Lucia. 'Just in a moment when I have explained something. I wish to make some things clear to Mr. Cameron and our few friends here. The jury have decided that my husband is dead, so we shall not be interrupted. Being interrupted is very trying. It affects one's nerves . . . what I want to explain is that Mr. Duffy was mistaken when he thought that Gilbert meant a cat. It was not a cat. We have never felt safe in keeping a

cat since the time my husband — but I need not go into that . . . The point is that it was Gilda whom Gilbert wished to shut out — my daughter Gilda —'

'Mother!' cried Kathrine, frightened.

'Do not interrupt me, Kathrine,' Lucia spoke severely. 'It is better that these gentlemen should understand. Perhaps we have kept things too much to ourselves, my dear. But our friends will appreciate a reluctance to speak of personal matters —'

She bowed courteously in Andrew Cameron's direction, and went on:

'It began a long time ago. Before my daughter Gilda was born. There were years, you see, and days and nights . . . all full of fear . . . one never knew. He was careful of that . . . almost always a surprise. One felt the shock . . . nervously, as Dr. Bryce would say . . .'

She paused and the words came more disjointedly.

'Then there was the separation . . . necessary, as you know . . . I missed my daughter Gilda very much . . . one misses a child . . . growing up . . . I am sure you can understand that?'

'We understand it very well,' said Dr. Bryce gravely. 'If you will rest for a while now —'

'Presently, Doctor. I was explaining, was I not, what had happened. I want to make it clear that Gilda was different . . . I felt very responsible for Gilda . . . I sent her away. And when she came back . . . I watched . . . But there were times when I forgot . . . I forgot that he was there — waiting . . . Gilbert could always wait . . . one never knew! He came to me that day — the day he died — and spoke of his rights. He said Gilda was his . . . a foolish idea, but dangerous . . . anything he might do . . . entirely within his rights . . . no one could stop him . . . no one . . . and then he whispered to me . . . no! . . . I can't tell you that. I mustn't. Nobody heard but me . . . dreadful . . . I don't seem to re-

member it all, though . . . something snapped . . . while he was whispering . . . a piece of elastic, I think. I heard it. A great relief. I stopped being afraid. I wasn't afraid any more when he said he would tell every one that Gilda had been in the swamp with Con. She had gone to see Con's little hut there — a childish escapade only. Gilda never means any harm. But Gilbert said wicked things. You would be very angry, Mr. Cameron, if I were to tell you the things he said.'

'I have small doubt of that,' said Andrew grimly. 'Would you be willing now to just let it rest until another time —'

'I'm afraid I cannot do that, Mr. Cameron. The doctor has ordered me to rest and I have promised to do so. I may not be able to see you another time. So I will continue now. You will see how it was that I was not afraid any more . . . although it doesn't seem as clear as it did . . . except that Gilbert had no right to hurt Gilda . . . it would not be allowed. I knew that . . . Did I explain all this to you that night, Kathrine?'

'No, dear,' said Kathrine gently.

'I intended to . . . about the door. I knew it was left open . . . these things are arranged, no doubt . . . it may have been Lizzy Yamen. I don't know. There is naturally a little mystery about how things are brought about . . . I saw the key there when I went upstairs. But I did not worry . . . no need to worry when everything is arranged . . .

'I went to bed . . . it is a great relief, gentlemen, to be without fear. I slept . . . no waiting . . . no listening . . . a great relief. Then I woke suddenly . . . it wasn't the sound of the door . . . Kathrine thought it was the door, but it wasn't . . . steps . . . I heard steps on the stair. I knew it was Gilbert coming for Gilda . . . to drag her down . . . I wasn't afraid. I got up . . . he said no one could stop him . . . but I wasn't afraid . . . I saw him go down the hall . . . quickly — like a young man . . . and then there was a loud noise . . .

'It wakened Kathrine. She said it was the door. She locked it and put away the key. Kathrine is very careful. She said nothing had happened. But I couldn't sleep any more. I thought Gilbert might come in again . . . and I began to be afraid, a little . . . what if he had shut Gilda out, after all? I went downstairs, very quietly so as not to waken Kathrine, and looked out . . . there was a flash of lightning . . . and I saw him . . . in the rain . . .

'So that,' she said, turning graciously to Euan, 'is why I was not as surprised as no doubt you expected . . . or was I surprised? I don't remember . . . I fainted, did I not? . . . that was because I saw a piece of Gilda's green dress in Gilbert's hand . . . a piece of her dress - think of it! . . . a very near thing, gentlemen . . . he had snatched at her, you see, as he went . . .'

In the silence of the room the blind tapped softly on the window.

'Did you' -- Dr. Bryce made a desperate effort to be quite rational -- 'did you stand in the doorway long?'

'Not long. It was damp there. I felt chilly.'

'And did you sleep when you returned to bed?'

'I don't remember,' vaguely, 'but I can sleep now, I think . . . a strain, you know. If you will excuse me --'

She rose with her customary grace. Kathrine slipped forward, but Gilda, very pale, laid a timid hand upon her arm.

'Let me, Kathy - please,' she said. And the older girl drew back.

'Thank you, Kathrine,' said Lucia. 'Gilda will help me get to bed. She does it very nicely.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE funeral of Gilbert Fenwell was largely attended. After all, he had been a Fenwell — the name was part of Blencarrow's history. Kindnesses of every kind poured in upon the family. The little episode of Gilda's dance was forgotten. She was, as even Mrs. Sowerby admitted, only a very young girl, and one must remember that, owing to regrettable circumstances, she had been for years without the fostering care of a mother.

'If my Phemie had been away from me during the most critical years of her girlhood,' said Mrs. Ellis feelingly, 'who can tell what difference it might have made?'

News of Kathrine's broken engagement created only a ripple. The wise ones discovered that they had always thought the two young people particularly unsuited to each other.

'As I said from the very first,' declared Mrs. McCorquodale, 'there was no real devotion on either side. Never a blush, Mrs. Ellis, no matter what was said. And her not going to the station to see him off or anything. It wasn't natural.'

Little Mrs. Gillfillan, once Miss Walker, intimated that this might have been owing to dear Kathrine's reserved nature. 'Though I'm sure I hope she didn't care for him,' she added; 'the poor girl has enough sorrow without that.'

Every one agreed heartily with this. For, indeed, the Fenwells' cup seemed overfull. Mrs. Fenwell was known to be very ill. 'Completely prostrated by the shock,' was how the 'Herald' put it. But Dr. Bryce said simply 'pneumonia.' She had collapsed immediately after the inquest and, although the trouble had been confined to one lung and the

most critical stage had passed, the patient did not seem to rally as quickly as might reasonably have been expected.

'She doesn't seem to try to get well,' said Mrs. Graham tearfully to Amy. 'I can't understand it. Perhaps she cared more for that dreadful man than any of us know.'

'They say he was fascinating when he was young,' mused Amy. 'And if it's true that the shock and illness have affected her memory, perhaps she thinks of him as he used to be. Does she ever speak to you of him in that way?'

'Oh, no, she never speaks of him at all. She says very little. She just lies there and does exactly what she is told. As long as Gilda is in the room she seems perfectly happy. And I must say that Gilda is very good about it, although Kathrine does most of the actual nursing. The only thing is — she gets steadily weaker. I am surprised that Dr. Bryce is not more worried.'

But Mrs. Graham's surprise was unjustified. Dr. Bryce was very much worried. And as days went by and the actual disease was conquered without the hoped-for return to health, his worry became acute foreboding.

'Any change to-day?' he would ask Kathrine as she met him in the hall, and the answering 'No change,' or, 'A little weaker,' was discouraging enough . . .

'Doctor,' said Kathrine one day, 'do you think she has really forgotten about — that night? She seems so happy and normal and she never says wild things any more. It seems to have passed away like a bad dream. But — why doesn't she get better?'

'I wish to God I knew,' said the doctor devoutly.

'Doctor — I have often wanted to ask you . . . *was* it a bad dream?'

The doctor looked troubled. 'I don't know, my dear,' he said. 'It is quite possible that it was. She was already ill and in a most feverish condition when she told it. And yet there was something dreadfully possible about what she

told. What particularly struck me at the time was the way in which she described her own mental state and its cause — the years of repressed fear, the bitterness of separation, and the final overpowering dread that everything might have been in vain and that the thing she had dreaded so long was actually upon her. No doubt she exaggerated what your father could or would do, but that is not the point. The point is that all her horror and terror of him flared up again, and then — well, you heard what she said, “something snapped.” She was no longer afraid. Nature had simply reached the limit. What followed undoubtedly took place, if it did take place, in a dreamlike state. The kind of thing that happens in a nightmare when one realizes what is going forward, but is quite without the power to prevent it. In her case, even the desire to prevent it was absent. All her ordinary reactions were inhibited . . . On the other hand, she may have imagined the whole thing.’

‘And, when she gets better?’

‘If she gets better it will all mean nothing to her — a bad dream, as you say.’

Kathrine went suddenly white, for she had not failed to notice the ‘if.’ The doctor looked into the troubled eyes, but his own could give her no comfort.

‘Would you like a specialist?’ he asked kindly.

‘I had thought of that. But she would hate it so. Unless you really think it might help.’

‘I think we are doing all that can be done,’ he said. ‘And the greatest thing in our favour is her peace of mind. The cure must come from within.’

But the cure did not come, and a few days after this, on a particularly lovely day, such as comes only with the closing of summer, the doctor in despair decided to see if words could reach the hidden thing which was baffling them all. He sent both girls away to rest and when he was alone with his patient:

'Mrs. Fenwell,' he said abruptly, 'will you tell me why it is that you are not helping us? You make no effort to get well. Do you realize it?'

He had expected, even hoped for, some indignation, some signs of dismay or agitation at the least, but Lucia had replied at once and with the simplicity of a child:

'Yes, I know. But, you see — I don't want to.'

'Can you tell me why?'

'I might — but telling wouldn't make you know. It's just that I can't want to. I've tried.'

'And yet — you might be happier than you have ever been,' ventured the doctor.

'You mean because Gilbert is dead?' thoughtfully — 'yes . . . but it came too late, you see. I died first.'

The doctor was silent.

'I don't know how to tell you what I mean,' she went on, 'but this — these days of peace — are like the chapter which is sometimes at the end of a book — the "epilogue," isn't it? . . . One doesn't begin again.'

'One might,' said the doctor stoutly. But conviction had ebbed from his voice.

Lucia shook her head.

The doctor went a step farther.

'Do you blame yourself for anything?' he asked.

'Oh, no.' Lucia seemed faintly surprised. 'It doesn't matter about me. Why should I?'

'No reason at all,' hastily.

Lucia pondered. 'I used to blame myself terribly about Gilda,' she said. 'But Kathrine said it was morbid. And perhaps it was. That was when we thought Gilda couldn't love any one. But she can. Don't you see it, Doctor?'

'She is devoted to you.'

Faint pink glowed in the sick woman's cheek. 'Yes, isn't it wonderful? And I used to be so afraid . . . foolish fancies . . . It was only that she was gay and thoughtless — my lovely Gilda!'

'Then — for her sake?' urged the doctor gently. 'How can you risk leaving her!'

Lucia's smile vanished. She beckoned him to bend down.

'The risk would be in staying,' she whispered. 'Can't you see that?'

'No, no!' cried the doctor in distress.

Lucia looked around furtively. 'It's Gilbert, you know,' she whispered. 'I can't get away! I was never strong. Gilbert was the strong one. I was never able to get away; I tried. It was no use. It's no use now. He will always be stronger . . . until — until it's all settled.'

'But, dear Mrs. Fenwell, try to realize! Your husband is gone. You are free —'

Lucia stopped him with a motion of her transparent hand.

'Free?' she said, 'I? . . . Oh, no. I am not free . . . Don't tell the girls! They are free. He isn't able to touch them now . . . the relief of it is wonderful! But for me it is different.' For the first time she showed signs of restlessness, turning her head on the pillow wearily. 'And I am tired. I want some one to settle it all and end it. I want to say to God, "Judge between us," and then I shall be free.'

'But — God is here,' said the doctor. 'I am no theologian, but He must be here if He is anywhere.'

Again the restless movement of the head.

'Yes. But I can't find Him . . . on account of Gilbert . . . don't tell the girls. I shall find Him — very soon — when I get away.'

The doctor rose abruptly. 'We have talked too long,' he said; 'you are exciting yourself. The plain fact is that if ever your daughters needed you, they need you now.'

Lucia's smile came back again.

'No. They are free even from the need of me. Kathrine has never needed me much. She has always kept her own soul. And Gilda is safe. Con will take care of Gilda. It's a secret. But she loves him. Gilda is really very loving, when

one understands . . . Deliver us from evil! — it's in the Lord's Prayer . . . and she is delivered . . . it isn't true what he said about a father's rights . . . She is mine . . . I paid . . . My Gilda!'

The doctor went out thoughtful. What hope he had brought with him, he left behind. The injury, he saw, had been greater than he had known. He had talked with a woman whose life was over . . . deliver us from evil . . . he shivered in the warm air.

Later, he unburdened his mind to Andrew Cameron.

'She was beyond reach,' he said, 'gone away . . . one spoke to her across great distances . . . I have seen many die. But this was different. I never realized before how apart one is.'

'Aye,' said Andrew, 'we go our ways alone.'

'She said she had paid,' went on the doctor. 'But whom? and why? It was as if, for the freeing of her children from the father she had given them, her own life had been demanded — the last payment in some imponderable price. But who would ask a price like that?'

'Who indeed?' queried Andrew.

'Some would say God.' The doctor spoke sombrely.

'Aye,' said Andrew. 'It's fair amazing what some folk can think of Him.'

'To her He was a Judge,' mused the doctor.

'And what better, since 'twas justice she was seeking?' Andrew laid a comforting hand on the doctor's arm. 'Did she not say, "He will judge between us and then I shall be free"? I'm thinking, whiles, that God is not this nor that, but just the need we have of Him.'

Some few days later Lucia Fenwell died in her sleep. She had seemed no worse when Kathrine had made her comfortable for the night, and Gilda, whose turn it was to rest on the couch beside her bed, had not known when the last light breath fluttered out. Only she had roused, in the first greyness of dawn, to a new sense of stillness in the room.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

AUTUMN came early that year. The first week of September showed no change, but, with the coming of the second week, something stirred at midnight, and summer, with no backward look, was gone.

In the morning the first leaves fell. Kathrine, opening the door of the unfinished house for the last time, found one lying on the sill. She picked it up — a perfect thing, blushing as if with gorgeous life, but dead and done for, for all that.

‘Oh — lovely!’ cried Gilda, running down the stair. ‘Give it to me, Kathy. See how it matches my hair.’

Kathrine handed her the flaming leaf. “‘Summer died last night,’” she quoted softly.

‘Then I like her mourning colours better than ours,’ declared Gilda. ‘Oh, Kathy, why do we wear this fusty black? Mother hated it.’

‘It suits you very well,’ said Kathrine with a half smile.

‘Yes, but it’s so depressing. Why need one be sadder than one has to be? Let’s put on colours, Kathy, and shock them all. It will celebrate our last day in this horrible house!’

The older girl shook her head. Her gaze wandered slowly over the dismantled hall and rooms, their familiar belongings already strange with the strangeness of upheaval and separation.

‘I wish they had not put auctioneers’ tickets on things,’ she said vaguely . . . ‘No, Gilda, I won’t shock anybody . . . no energy! I would like to go out of this house so quietly that no one would see me go or know where I was going.’

‘You think you would,’ said Gilda wisely. ‘But you wouldn’t. You’d feel horribly neglected and ill-used — and cross, too.’

‘You’re wrong about the house being horrible, though.’

Kathrine followed out her own thought. 'It's not. It's odd how I feel about this house — as if we Fenwells had been horrible to it, not it to us. We promised it beauty and dignity; we gave it ugliness and derision, and now we are leaving it to decay. And it's quite a young house, not old at all. We haven't treated it fairly.'

'For goodness' sake!' said Gilda. 'You talk as if it were alive.'

'Perhaps houses are alive. Their lives are their own just as our lives are ours. And with just as great differences. This house has been warped and distorted from the very first. . . . I wonder who will live here now.'

'Nobody,' said Gilda promptly. 'Don't you know that people are saying it is haunted?'

'Haunted!'

'Yes, really. I saw some children daring each other to pass the gate the other night, after dusk. Blencarrow has never had a haunted house. And this one certainly looks the part. It will fill a felt want.'

'Oh, how cruel!' said Kathrine. 'I wish we weren't going. It's like desertion.'

Gilda laughed. 'You can come back every day and hold its hand,' she suggested. 'But as for me, I will never, never enter the gate again.'

The note of passion in this was not lost on Kathrine. She looked at her sister curiously. She knew that in many ways she had not probed the depths of Gilda.

'Are you being morbid about anything?' she asked in her direct way.

But Gilda looked merely surprised. 'You mean about leaving the door open? No. Why should I? It was the purest accident. If you had done it, should you have been — morbid?'

Kathrine hesitated. 'I don't know,' she admitted frankly. 'I hope I should have had more sense.'

'Well, I have,' serenely. 'You think I'm hard as bricks, I suppose. But why invent responsibility where none exists? . . . Mind you,' she went on after a moment, 'I can see that, if I had deliberately taken a risk, I might feel very differently. But I didn't. I was thinking of Con — the door, and what it meant, didn't exist. But' — a sharp little shiver passed over her — 'I don't think it's safe or healthy to hate any one as much as I hated Father. I'm glad that's done with.'

'You mean you don't hate him now?'

'He's gone. I don't think of him at all. I'm free. I want to begin all over.'

'We can't begin all over. We can only go on.'

'Oh, don't be wise, Kathy!' restlessly. 'You know what I mean. A fresh start, anyway. I don't blame myself about Father at all. But I am sorry — about other things.'

Kathrine was silent.

'I am sorry about Mother,' said Gilda a little fiercely. 'You needn't believe it if you don't want to, but I get sorer all the time. And I'm sorry about Garry. But I'm getting paid back for that, if it's any comfort to you.'

'I can't say that it is,' said Kathrine with grim humour. 'But please do not blame retribution for your difficulties with Con. You will have to give in there, Gilda.'

'I shan't!'

Kathrine smiled. 'Oh, you'll rather enjoy it,' she prophesied. 'But speaking of Con, he said he was coming to take you to his aunt's to-day until after the auction. He said you did not like auctions. How did he know that?'

Gilda dimpled. 'Because I ran away from Aunt Elizabeth's. Well, if he comes and asks me prettily I may go.'

'There is some one at the gate now.'

'The auctioneer's clerk, probably.'

'You don't blush like that for the auctioneer's clerk — there, he's calling you.'

'If he thinks I'll go for being called! —'

'He won't wait long,' warned Kathrine.

A clear whistling came from beyond the gate —

*'Rosy apple, lemon or pear,
Bunch of roses she shall wear.'*

'Here's your hat,' said Kathrine.

Gilda set her lips tightly. The whistle continued —

*'Take her by her lily white hand,
Lead her to the altar . . .'*

Green fire shot from Gilda's eyes.

'I shan't go,' she muttered. 'If he wants me, let him come for me.'

'But if you want him —' said Kathrine.

'I don't want him!' retorted Gilda. But she moved, as if not aware that she was moving, toward the door.

'I shan't go one step,' she repeated firmly.

There was a small silence during which the garden seemed to listen. Then the whistle began again. But surely it was farther off now, fainter —

'Give her kisses, one, two, three —'

Yes, certainly it was fainter . . .

'I'll go,' said Gilda, a sob in her throat, 'but, oh, won't I get even for this some day!' . . .

Then her voice drifted back, sweet and unaware, from the garden.

'Oh, Con — is that you?'

Kathrine smiled a little wistfully as she straightened the auctioneers' labels.

The auction, which had not been a large affair, nor very interesting, was over. Kathrine, with a handkerchief over her hair, was sweeping up waste paper in an empty room.

And Euan, loitering in the doorway, became conscious of a sudden, vivid memory.

'Why, Kathy,' he exclaimed, 'you look exactly like you did when I first saw you . . . in the old Primitive Methodist Hall . . . my earliest and only time in singing school.'

Kathrine emptied her dustpan into the basket beside her.

'You must have seen me often before that,' she said.

'Yes. But not to *see* you. Before that you were just a girl . . . say, Kathy, do you remember that night at all?'

Kathrine's rare dimple showed itself. 'I do,' she said; 'I remember that you sang "Do."'

'Hum!' said Euan, dashed. 'Well, I never did it again, anyway. And I deserved pity, not mirth. Garry felt that. Do you remember how he sang flat to keep me company?' (Euan had decided that Garry's name was not to rise as a barrier of silence between them.)

'No,' said Kathrine. She was surprised that she had not remembered about Garry singing flat. She had forgotten that there had been a pre-Garry time. And yet certainly all that she recalled of that evening had to do with a little freckled-faced boy who had emptied her dustpan and tried to screen her tucked-up skirts from the prying eyes of Phemie Ellis.

'I remember Phemie Ellis, though,' she added slyly.

Euan remembered Phemie, too, and said so with feeling.

'That was a near thing!' he admitted, and they both laughed.

Kathrine untied the handkerchief from her hair and joined him in the doorway.

'When are you going back to University, Euan?'

'Don't know. Not yet awhile.'

'But the term begins —'

'I know. But I'm needed here for a bit.'

'Isn't your father well?' anxiously.

'Fine! — that is, of course, he isn't ill or anything. But

he's getting older and — I say, isn't there another parcel I'm supposed to take somewhere?'

'There are those curtains for Mrs. Graham Irving. She said you had promised to take them over.'

'Well — Mother promised for me. She thinks I need exercise. How soon may I come to see you, Kathy, when you are a lady boarder?'

'I don't know whether lady boarders are allowed to see any one. Gilda and I can't run to a sitting-room. Boarding is going to be rather an experiment. We might sit on the veranda, perhaps?'

'Not much!' said Euan. 'I know that veranda. Everybody sits on it. Why not "the little roads and the sky"?'

'W-ell, sometime.'

'"*Sometimes*," you mean. There will be intervals, of course. Well, I'm off. See you later.'

Kathrine sat on the doorstep. All the chairs were gone, excepting the four kitchen ones which Andrew Cameron had undertaken to deliver to the Widow Millar. The house was empty. Soon Gilda and Con would return and then she would lock the door. It was just as well that the auction had tired her. She wouldn't mind locking the door — much.

Her thoughts wandered . . . how funny people were at auctions . . . never buying things one might expect . . . Old Captain Trent buying Gilda's little rocking-chair . . . had he some dream child who would sit in it? . . . It would have been nice to keep the old sofa . . . Whatever would Mrs. Jones do with the sideboard? . . . Had it been foolish to put aside the table-linen . . . and the glass and china? . . . they would have to stay packed up for ages . . . And why had Gilda insisted on keeping the bureau with the mirror which was slightly green? . . . funny! . . . Odd how the little coloured prints from the bedrooms had brought good prices while the fine engraving of Mary, Queen of Scots, had gone for a song . . . and her mother's old piano . . . why had Mr.

Dwight bought that? Had Garry asked him to? . . . did he think of Gilda singing there in the lamplight . . . Poor Garry!

Thoughts of the auction faded and she remembered Garry's good-bye . . . It had come at a good time. There was so much else, she had felt almost nothing. She had been drained of feeling. Perhaps it was the same with him. He had said little . . . had not asked to see Gilda — for he, too, was shorn of illusion. Gilda had done the thing thoroughly . . . had been rather brave about it at the last — telling him plainly that she had never cared. Kathrine knew that she would have been wrung with sorrow for Garry then, only that she had done with feeling for the time. She had been practical with him.

'What are you going to do, Garry?' she had said.

'I don't know,' he had answered. 'Make my own acquaintance, perhaps' . . . adding, 'I don't expect to like myself much.'

He had been practical, too. She had been so glad that he had not been pitiful of her as of a girl whom he should have loved. Mercifully he had been enmeshed in his own half-understood emotions. As Gilda's favoured lover he would have been embarrassed, ill at ease . . . as the rejected of Gilda he had been as miserable as she . . . more miserable . . . Yes, with a kind of wonder she had seen that the tower of his life was shaken while hers still held strongly . . . Well . . . these things happen . . . one doesn't know . . .

The gate clicked. It was Andrew Cameron come for the Widow Millar's chairs.

'But they'll wait a bit,' said Andrew, 'if maybe I can have a word with you.'

Kathrine made room for him upon the step. But he did not speak at once.

'I misdoubt,' he said, 'that Janet would say I'd better be leaving you to yourself for a while yet.'

'I don't want to be left to myself,' said Kathrine hastily. 'I mean — not by you,' she added shyly.

'It's about Euan,' Andrew began. 'He's all for staying home from the college.'

Kathrine nodded. 'Yes. He spoke of helping you in the shop.'

'Did he so? And do you think I'm looking like one greatly in need of help?'

'No, I don't,' said Kathrine with awakening interest.

'Nor am I. It has pleased the Lord to continue me in the best of health. Moreover, there is help to hand if needed. But the lad is wishful to remain at home.'

'It doesn't sound like Euan.'

Andrew's eyes showed a faint twinkle. 'His mother says it sounds exactly like him,' he said.

'Oh,' said Kathrine . . . 'Then, perhaps,' she ventured, after a pause, 'there may be another reason. He may think that some one else needs him.'

'It might be so,' agreed Andrew.

'I'll see that he gets that idea out of his head,' promised Kathrine briskly.

Andrew raised one eyebrow. 'Aye — if 'twas as easy as that! But you've maybe noticed that Euan is fair stupid -- when it suits his way.'

'I have noticed it,' with a smile. 'But I'll make this very clear. I'd never forgive myself if I didn't. Why, Euan is just like —' she hesitated, and greatly to her annoyance felt the colour flood her face.

'Like a brother to you, you mean,' said Andrew innocently. 'Aye, but brothers are terribly chancy at times. And being a brother, Euan will not leave Blencarrow with you here and lonely — after all that's passed. The lad has a grip of the essentials, I'll say that. But he'll go — if you go too.'

Under that frank and kindly gaze, Kathrine's flush faded. 'Tell me what you mean,' she said. 'I'll do anything for Euan. At least — except —'

Andrew's blue twinkle reassured her.

'That's fine!' said he. 'And as for the exception you were thinking of, that is Euan's affair, not mine. Forby, there's more than Jacob that can wait a few years for his lass . . . no, the plan I had in mind was only that you should not go back to your school work here. A change might do yourself good, moreover.'

'Oh, I should like it! But I must work, you know. And I could not expect to get another school this year.'

'No,' agreed Andrew; 'but it would not be another school I was thinking of.'

Kathrine stared into the trampled garden and for a brief moment it seemed to open out before her into a glowing world. She missed a sentence or two and when she listened again:

'It would be a great pleasure to your friends,' Andrew was saying formally, 'a great pleasure to welcome you back with letters to your name.'

The girl did not speak and, taking heart, he went on more confidently.

'There was a time when it was put to you to choose,' he said. 'And the choice you made was in the way of duty. Now you must choose again. I would not have you lower your fine pride, you know that, nor do you owe my son anything but what any friend may owe another. But if you can see your way to doing this thing, I would be fine and glad — I and his mother.'

Kathrine withdrew her eyes from the garden. They were full of tears.

'Now, now!' said Andrew, 'I'll have Janet in my hair for this!'

'No! . . . it's only that you are so heavenly kind. And somehow you make it seem — not impossible. I've tried to believe that I did not mind staying on here . . . and teaching in the school . . . and getting older . . . and older. But I couldn't have stood it! I should have fought my way out

somehow. And now you come and throw my dream into my lap — books, study, a wider world.'

'Would it be all that?' asked Andrew humorously. 'Well, maybe. Though I've thought, whiles, that the world's as big from one point as from another. Is it settled, then?'

'You really think you can afford it?' timidly. 'And that it won't be too long before I can pay you back?'

Andrew, it appeared, did really think so. But an anxious expression crept into his face.

'I'm hoping,' said he, 'that the paying back will not be too soon. You see, there's a small matter of a plough inventit, long since, upon the Sabbath day. The money for that has been much on my mind since the Tiddy Agricultural Implements have been wishful to take it up, and —'

'You mean the Tiddy people are going to make your plough?' delightedly.

'Aye,' said Andrew, much abashed. 'But it was on the Sabbath —'

'Oh, how splendid!' cried Kathrine, disregarding the Sabbath. 'Why didn't Euan tell me?'

'He doesn't know it yet,' said Andrew. 'I was not just exactly sure that a plough inventit on the Sabbath —'

But he was not allowed to finish this time either, for Kathrine, to his infinite discomfiture, kissed him promptly in the region of his nearest ear.

'There!' said Kathrine. 'That's what you get for inventing ploughs on Sunday and tempting poor working girls with offers of the higher education . . . and all the time you know you believe that woman's place is in the Home. What will Miss Cynthia Wakefield think?'

'Will you be telling her?' asked Andrew, plainly startled.

Kathrine laughed. 'No,' she promised. 'The dark secret shall be kept. Only, she is bound to guess. It's all right, though; she will think her own arguments have convinced you.'

'They were verra convincing arguments,' said Andrew. 'And she is a verra fine lass. You'll be knowing her better in the city, belike?'

'I may,' said Kathrine cautiously. 'She and Euan are great friends, aren't they?'

'Aye,' said Andrew, 'she and Euan are like —'

'Brother and sister,' finished Kathrine — and again her low laugh rippled out.

Andrew, thus derided, rose from the step with some dignity. He was infinitely happy to hear that laugh. Where there is mirth there is healing.

'I'll be taking the chairs to the Widow Millar now,' said he.

They loaded the chairs into the wagon at the gate.

'You'll find a bit bank-book in the mail the morn's morn,' said Andrew. 'And I'm grateful to you, Kathrine Fenwell, remember that.'

The girl turned back from the gate. There was dusk already on the curving path, and deeper dusk in the deserted house, but Kathrine's tread was lighter than it had been at noon. Shadows were there, and echoes and emptiness, but now they seemed as things withdrawn — ghostly — belonging to another world — a world from which a way of escape had opened.

'No, no, I must not!' whispered Kathrine fearfully. She thought of Lucia and her heart contracted . . . Lucia had not escaped . . . she was there — somewhere in the shadows . . . 'I cannot,' whispered Kathrine; 'it isn't fair!'

But, fair or not, the youth within her would not silence . . . it was alive . . . and these . . . these other things . . . were dead. It had the future, and they . . . poor things . . . had only the past . . .

There was a sound of voices from the street and Gilda's delightful laugh. Con was bringing her back. And Euan was with them. Wherever he had been, Euan always managed

to come home this way. His good-night floated over the lilac bush.

‘Good-night, Kathy!’

‘Good-night, Euan.’

‘See you to-morrow —’

‘*To-morrow* —’ echoed the empty house.

THE END

